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1. Blake

BLAKE

Despite what a regular mortal may think, love potions are not illegal. They're just a taboo form of magic and when the potion is administered incorrectly, the consequences for both parties could be dire. Too much fennel and your lover may become so obsessed with you, they decide to lock you in a cage forever, or they'll kill anyone who breathes in your direction. If the witch forgets to add just a sprinkle of cinnamon, whoever drank the potion might become so overwhelmed with emotion every time they see you, they're compelled to sob uncontrollably.

The worst part might be when the target of the witch's affection drinks from the potion, a cry of anguish cracks through the sky. It's the sound of someone losing the love of their life to a wicked witch. It's the cry of someone's heart breaking. That alone could drive a person mad.

Blake never considered using a love potion.

Not until he took one look at Mike Finley's face.

Mike Finley and his soft tussle of blonde curls. Mike Finley and his chin dimple and endless ocean eyes. Mike Finley with the kind of smile that made Blake forget his last name. He would fork over his Social Security number or his entire inheritance, if he could just spend one magical evening in the back of Mike Finley's Toyota Corolla.

Blake left his parent's home for college for one reason and one reason only:

To date without his older brothers getting in the way.

After twenty-two years of being dateless and alone on the

weekends, Blake planned to fall in love and he needed to do that soon because the winter break was right around the corner and he'd be forced to return home a failure.

When he first saw Mike, Blake was so distracted looking at his face, Blake ran right into a glass door. Sure, he nearly broke his nose and ruined a perfectly good sweater with a blood stain, but Mike came to his aid with an ice pack and a winning smile.

Twenty minutes after that, Blake scored a date.

"Hey, Blake!" Mike came jogging up the sidewalk. This college town was dressed for the holiday, its roads framed by trees dripping with Christmas lights enlarged Lamppost wrapped up in tinsel. Every shop was as pretty as a Christmas card. Blake wished he could capture it all in a snow globe to take home to show his family.

He wanted to come home with some sort of proof that he could make it on his own. That he didn't need his brothers to survive. That he didn't need Magic to be worth something.

Mike joined Blake wearing one of those skintight work out shirts and a pair of shorts that multitasked showing off his exposed calf muscles, but also cupping his butt. Needing an extra moment, Blake turned to the side and made a thousand dumb faces of excitement before he looked back like a normal person. Blake was good at pretending to be a normal functioning person with half a brain.

"Hey, Mike," Blake said and ran his fingers through his black curls.

"You're pretty dressed up for running around the block," Mike said in good humor and Blake's brain froze. He super glued his smile and just nodded, slowly putting the situation together. When Mike suggested the date, he said something about taking Blake around the block and something about working up a sweat, but Blake had hoped that was more of an innuendo than Mike suggesting they actually run a 10k or something.

I'm such an idiot, Blake thought to himself as he realized the truth.

The beautiful Mike Finley did not ask Blake out on a date.

He asked him to go jogging.

"Oh, yeah, uh," Blake said, gargling his thoughts in the back of his throat as he thought up some excuse to why he'd be wearing a sweater, jeans and a button up to workout. Thankfully, he wore his trusty pair of converses (not that he owned another pair of shoes).

With his face burning red hot, he said, "I've got uh plans after this and I like to really, really sweat. Like if I don't ruin these clothes, did I even work out?"

Why was he like this?

Mike laughed and nudged Blake's arm a little. "You're a weird guy, Blake."

"Thank you."

"Now, let's get our blood pumping," Mike said and started running in place. He patted Blake's back again, before taking off. Blake watched him go in amazement. Someone so gorgeous shouldn't be allowed to say something that could be taken so suggestively. It's probably Blake's fault. Actually, it was totally him. Blake had spent so much time imagining what he would say to a hot guy, he forgot he needed to actually go through with it. He didn't have enough practice talking to boys.

Honk. Honk.

Blake jumped at the sound of a car.

Mike turned, letting his run fizzle out. They both watched a shiny black Rolls Royce drive up against the sidewalk. It looks so out of place. So shiny in freshly waxed. The street was quaint with a homemade charm. Nothing like that car.

Blake's heart sank to his toes. That was his dad's car. He knew this was going to happen. He just didn't think it'd happen so soon.

From the driver's seat, Adrian emerged and fixed his blazer straight. Everything about Adrian always sat neat and tidy from his styled white blonde hair and his crisp white shirts to his silk ties and shiny

shoes. That man has never scuffed a thing in his life.

Except Blake's good time maybe.

"Young master, Blake, I've been looking for you everywhere," Adrian said, keeping the car running as he walked up the sidewalk. He stood beside Blake at a full foot taller and with twice the muscles. He was just as good of an assistant as a bodyguard, usually for Blake's father and that must be why he was here.

"I've come to take you home," Adrian explained the way doctors gave bad news. The air grew colder and somehow the light dimmed. The last Blake checked, there was a zero percent chance of rain. Even the world felt bad for him.

To Blake's brothers, Adrian kept his brown eyes cold and distant. A good bodyguard stayed close to his charge's side but stayed away from their personal life. This wasn't the truth between Blake and Adrian. Blake was special. For most of Blake's life, Adrian was his only friend.

Looks like that fact would continue to be true.

"What..." Blake tried to say, but his mouth went totally dry. "What about my stuff?"

"It's already packed."

"Oh."

Adrian smiled for a brief moment and placed his hand on the small of Blake's back, gently guiding him to the car. "We leave immediately, sir." He whispered, "I'm sorry."

Blake nodded like a good son and opened the door to the backseat. Just as he was ducking his head and settling inside, Mike's voice called out. "Hey, Blake, do you know this guy? Is everything okay?"

Adrian turned the charm on as easily as flicking on a light switch, smiling brightly. "Hello, yes. I work for Blake's family. Have you heard of Winslow Apothecary?"

Mike wouldn't know. Mike was perfectly human and humans didn't know about the largest incorporation that produces, makes, and sells high quality potions for reasonable rates. It's not only the longest running apothecary, but it has made the Winslows the wealthiest magical family in North America.

As he moved down the sidewalk, Adrian closed Blake's door. Blake's body deflated as he melted against the seats. All that space outside. Reduce to this. Blake touched the cold glass as his heart broke in two. He listened to the heaters blast as he watched Adrian approached Mike. They spoke for a moment, before Adrian revealed a small perfume bottle that Blake recognized all too well. He sprayed it in Mike's face just once. That was all it took for a cloud of purple mist to appear.

Mike stumbled, coughing and waving the remanence of the spray from his face. He blinked and shook his head as if coming out from a daze. Adrian left Mike there to scrub the confusion from his eyes. When the cloud disappeared, Mike looked around with his brows quirked as if he just forgot something he was about to say. He checked the sky, his watch and finally scratched his head, but carried on anyways. He jogged down the sidewalk and out of sight.

Just like that, the potion erased Blake from existence. Again. This happened every time Blake thought he was going to live an independent life. His family took him back with some excuse why he needed to stay home.

Adrian climbed inside and started driving.

"You didn't have to do that," Blake said after a while, when he climbed out of his pit of despair. He crossed his arms, holding himself, unable to feel the heat sink into his skin or clothes. "It's not like I leave an impression on anyone."

"You know that's not true." Adrian gave his young charge the side-eye from the rearview window. Avoiding eye contact, Blake stared out the window and watched the college town go by. The cold finally sunk its claws into the earth and shook all the leaves from the trees.

Blake didn't want to ask but...

He had to ask.

"Why am I getting picked up? Is everything alright at home?" Blake stressed his seatbelt to lean forward. "Are they taking me out of school? I haven't even finished the semester. What about my lease? And... and everything?"

"Your parents will explain. Nothing's wrong, but they do need to speak to you at once," Adrian assured him and freaked him out all at the same time. Blake didn't sit back. He clenched the seat cushions, trying to will the answers out of Adrian. Deep down he knew it was useless. Blake really thought it'd be different this time. He thought he could finally have some freedom.

"I've been instructed to take you directly home but..." Adrian sighed. "We can make a detour. Just between you and me, I didn't expect so much traffic."

A lie. That also broke one of Adrian's rules. He never lied to Blake's father.

Except when Blake needed him to do it.

Blake's tension relaxed just a little, but the misery in his heart stayed. The grief of losing this life painted the walls of his body with cement. It was hard to move. Hard to breathe. The weight of it all left a bruising ache. He rested against the cushion again and requested what he usually wanted when he felt this hopeless. "Let's eat some garbage."

"Coming right up, sir."

#

Author's Note

Oh man guys.

Here we go.

New book! I feel like I've been writing Going Rogue for forever. It's like I don't know how to write another story anymore. Lol. But here we are. I'm excited for you guys to meet Blake and Danny. They're my new boys and I'm so happy to add them to the family. It's full of fun stuff like childhood friends meeting again, royal wedding planning and it's all set around Christmas time! I might have been watching lots of Hallmark Christmas movies doN'T JUDGE ME

If you haven't heard, The Golden Rule is now a premium story on Tapas! It's very exciting!! And this isn't a spoiler, but you'll actually see a few characters from that book in this one! (I'll give you a hint. One is a vampire and one can see into the future. Okay! That's all you get!)

Tell me your first impressions of Blake! What are your thoughts on books with arranged marriages? Would you consider using a Love Potion? After all that angst in Going Rogue, are you ready for another romantic comedy??

I'm happy to be back guys! I've missed you <3

2. Daniel

DANIEL

"We'll have to reschedule the meeting with the Cordova Coven. I'm not cancelling on a Children's Home charity- *Shit- Fuck*-" Daniel accidentally texted his cousin what he just told his assistant Michael. In theory, having two phones was helpful. In practice, Daniel looked ridiculous and his giant dumb fingers loved making mistakes. Daniel hated mistakes. He made too many lists, came up with too many plans and detailed schedules to make a mistake.

He planned so much, even life never surprised him.

"*Your highness*," Michael said warningly, but the way he usually spoke, which was void of emotions, but also somehow judgmental. The Christmas season guaranteed Daniel to be around more children than usual, so all the typical swearing needed to become a thing of the past.

Daniel rolled his eyes. "Fine, *fiddlesticks*. My apologies, Michael. I'm all turned around," Daniel grunted as he fumbled with his keys. Usually, everyone left their doors open and wide at the Bellerose Estate. It struck Daniel as odd that his parents would lock the doors to their small separate apartment inside the castle, but his curiosity didn't linger long. He was going through the list of tasks he still needed accomplished before he even considered going to bed.

Daniel was the crown prince to the Sagewick coven. Their family has ruled for almost 500 years and Daniel had every intention to keep that tradition going. Usually vampire kings and queens only ruled over patches of cities and countries. This was the only Coven in the world to rule across an entire island, an entire country.

Daniel struggled opening the door with his hands full of packages. He sent Michael home already, but Daniel noticed too many

discrepancies on the calendar to be ignored, so he called.

Daniel didn't know much about his assistant, but Michael always answered.

No matter what he was doing, whatever it may be. Daniel didn't even have a guess. For all he knew, Michael went to the bowls of this huge castle and plugged himself in at night.

"Yes, to the Charity," Daniel started from the top. He spent too much time coming up with new responses off the cuff. "If we have time, I'll make an appearance at Aunt Mary's party and we might be able to grab a drink at the La Bella opening-"

Daniel stumbled into the dark room, tripping over something rubbery and strange. Even in the pitch black, Daniel could see well enough, but what he saw didn't quite make sense. Something or someone moved as if trying to shuffle out of view and all of Daniel's body hair stood on edge. Suddenly, the room's wrongness overwhelmed him. He let everything fall and clatter to the floor, lashing out at the shape.

His claws extended as the adrenaline kicked into his veins. His body fizzled with the rush of these feelings. "*What are you doing here?"* He roared, fumbling and striking his hands through something less solid than he anticipated and tripped over his own feet.

The lights flickered on and Daniel's mother appeared from the corner. "Darling? What's going on?' She asked, her impossibly dark eyes looking up at the high ceiling. Daniel followed the look to see a cluster of silver, gold, and white balloons floating. They lightly tapped the antique coffered ceiling. At Daniel's feet were the remnants of the golden strings that originally kept them on the ground.

His mother realized the scene and laughed behind her hand. "What a fearsome vampire."

Daniel let out a tired sigh.

Even his skin felt tired. His eyes itched to close.

"You're home late," his mother commented, her voice crisp and accented like a lovely London bird. She had the voice of a sweet older woman reading her favorite passage out of a children's book.

Daniel was made of the same stuff of his mother, the same cool onyx skin and sharp angular features. Her usual mane of black curls were stuffed inside a silky red headwrap that matched her long robe with soft feathers covering the cuffs and the collar.

However, a small curl peaked out from the silk. A curl unlike the rest, silver and coarse. Daniel's mother stayed away from the cameras lately, kept herself away from the public's scrutiny. The white stripe was more than odd, it was alarming. Vampires aged, but at such an incredibly slow rate, slower if their diet consisted of the freshest blood of the human variety. So, what did it say about their coven that they couldn't keep their Queen healthy and full? What did that silver lock say about her son?

Nothing about her diet changed.

And yet, her hair was turning gray and crow's feet appeared beside her eyes.

"Mother..." Daniel shook his head, readying himself for a lecture. Picking his fallen packages, he told Michael, "I'm sorry about this, but I'll have to call you back." He hung up and pocketed both his phones so he could drop the packages onto the one of the button tufted velvet sofa. Everything about this place was stuck in the 18th century with its grand designs, lush colors and fabrics, but also its lack of practicality.

Daniel narrowed his brow at his mother. "What are you doing out of bed? Where's father?"

The closer he approached, the more he could see the flaws, which to vampires was like smelling blood in the water. She wasn't old enough to be crumbling, to be decaying already. Only the family and one doctor knew something was wrong and just that. Something wasn't right, but they have no cause or a name for the sickness, so there was no cure. All they had was the fear of losing her too soon.

His mother smiled softly. "I wanted to stay up to see you."

"See me?" Daniel shook his head, unable to wrap his head around the odd night. He closed his hands around her arms, a part of him thinking he could manually make everything alright and fix the problem. It was in Daniel's job description to fix everyone's problems.

Daniel said, "You could've seen me tomorrow morning-" Then, he remembered. "Well, actually brunch. I need to step out at-"

His mother's smile didn't falter. She raised to her tiptoes and placed a small kiss on Daniel's cheek. "My sweet, I stayed up to tell you two things." She reached up with her elegantly long fingers, only bogged down by her shimmering wedding ring. "First, I've cancelled your meetings for the morning. You're mine until the afternoon. I know you hate surprises, but I swore Michael to secrecy. Your father and I have something very important to discuss."

Again, Daniel felt flipped around.

He blinked. "Is everything alright?"

"We'll explain in the morning."

"And what else? What was the second thing?"

"Happy Birthday, my sweet."

She smiled and brought him into a hug, an embrace that wasn't as tight as it used to be. By his mother's touch alone, Daniel could be coaxed to sleep. Lately, a full night's rest was a luxury he couldn't afford. Not that he could sleep if he wanted to do it. Every time he closed his eyes and stilled, his mind remained restless. And if he couldn't sleep then there was no point of lying down and doing nothing. Most nights, he put himself to work.

Leaning away, she smoothed her thumb over his cheek and admired his face, maybe remembering that night twenty-four years ago. With a tired sigh, she let him go and walked back the way she came. She didn't glance back to say, "Remember you're ours tomorrow morning. If you reschedule your father and I again, I will

not forgive you."

"Yes, your majesty," Daniel said, tinged with sarcasm.

She glanced back for that with her old devious smile that lately, she was too tired to make. Then, she disappeared and left Daniel in the dark, surrounded by all the balloons and confetti. He walked about the room and admired the decorations for his birthday party and a cake that went uneaten. He snatched one of the strawberries covered in chocolate, but quickly lost the taste for it and dropped it back into the icing. He found his pile of presents, reading the glittering tags. The cousins came. His parents were there. A few friends from college.

He looked around the room.

They were all here. Together.

"Waiting for me," Daniel whispered, surprised by the sound of his own sadness.

He couldn't remember the last time he saw them all together. He probably wouldn't get another chance until Christmas. He debated going to bed, melting inside his sheets, but he doubted he could even remember the way. Eventually, he found himself in his office and worked until the hours slipped away and he dragged himself to the couch to steal a few precious hours of comfort. Those hopeful hours crumbled into a mere two and he was up again to hear the bad news.

#

Author's Note

So, I think updates will be on Mondays! It's working out for my schedule right now, but that might change, but for the time being, it's gonna be a Monday Fun Day kind of thing.

And now we got Daniel's first POV, that dork forgetting his birthday and loving his mom. What a dork. He's a YOUNG vampire. He's twenty-five and he's ACTUALLY twenty-five for important book reasons ;)))) I'm so excited for the next chapter. Blake and Daniel

are going to get the whole family curse spiel. It's written in kind of a fun/weird way and I hope it comes across well! I'll see you guys next Monday <3

What did you think about Daniel? First impression! Go! How does he compare to Blake? Are you interested to see how they'll interact? Have you ever forgotten about your birthday? Any comment is appreciated!

If you like this book, be sure to check out my other romances!

3. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Blake knew there was an envelope in front of him and he knew the person in the picture, but nothing was connecting, not in a way that made sense. He sat at the dining room table as if not being inside his father's office suddenly made the whole affair casual and not a business meeting. The staff closed all the doors. Even Adrian agreed to stand outside.

Yet, he could hear the faint clattering and the sound of the daily activities of the manor. This house groaned, compiled of old aches and stiff joints from its many centuries standing tall. Not that it looked like a haunted house. It was too soft, too warm for that. Blake's heart matched the shape of this house and held the same love for the people inside.

He looked across the table at his parents. They were surrounded by the silver, armies of candles, napkin holds, silverware and a few bits and bobs, spread out to sort, clean and maybe even replace. He met their eyes and the knife twisted in his back. He couldn't help feeling like this was a betrayal, despite the blood they shared.

The entire Winslow family was made up of willowy people with long limbs and swanlike necks. Blake and his brothers all shared their father's hawk nose, even though they all looked like ravens. They had protruding purple eyes from the magic coursing through their veins. That magic, that constant feeling of static made their inky black hair curl, but the way Blake's hair always sat on his head in a mess was a personal feature.

"Do you remember Daniel Bellerose...?" Blake's mother, Emma asked about the full-grown man in the picture, the headshot they used to announce Danny's future Reign over the Bellerose coven. He had the remanence of the kid Blake once knew, subtle features that weren't quite missing and yet, so different. It was his eyes. They were darker. Colder.

"Do you remember when we used to visit their family in Sagewick?" His father asked next, maybe making sure Blake hadn't gone completely catatonic.

Sagewick, an island where winter and the fall seasons had dominion. So tiny, Blake used to own a snow globe that he truly made him feel like he held the entire island in his hands. The Bellerose family ran the entire coven on that island. They were basically royalty. From what Blake remembered, they were treated as such.

Danny.

Looking at Danny's picture stirred up a crazy feeling in the pit of his stomach. He remembered him. How could he not? They spent the majority of their childhood together and every Christmas until Blake turned twelve. Blake's face warmed.

Danny Bellerose sure grew up.

If Mike's looks made Blake smack face first into a wall...

Danny was so attractive he might've walked into rush hour traffic.

"Yeah." Blake shook his head, leaning back in his seat. He had to stay on task. "I remember Danny. He was such a punk." All the memories he repressed jumped back at him in full force. "He abandoned me during a game of hide and seek once, remember?! Nobody found me for two hours and I ended up peeing my pants—hey! He's the reason I got dubbed a cry baby, you know!"

"He's older now," Emma insisted, her smile tight.

"That's—"

Blake took a deep breath. He reeled in the anger and annoyance, leaving him with nothing but confusion and the cold feeling of trepidation, the same feeling of standing on the very edge of a cliff and facing a very long way down. Blake ran his hand through his dark curls and sighed. Underneath the table, he picked at the skin around his nails.

"That's not what I have a problem with. I can't believe you're just telling me now that I'm engaged. I'm twenty-two-years old and you didn't think to tell me that until now? Doesn't it feel a little too late to you?" The more he spoke, the less he felt like he could get the words out, the less he felt like he could breathe. His skin became sweltering hot and he wanted to open all the doors and windows in the entire house.

Blake rubbed the side of his head. "Does Danny know?"

Emma nodded. "Daniel's parents are telling him this morning too."

"Oh, good. Good. Good. Good. It's good to have something in common with your fiancé. We've both been lied to our whole lives."

#

DANIEL

"Yes, of course," Daniel said as he walked around the sitting room for the sixth time in the last minute. His arms crossed tighter and tighter, without him even realizing it. "I remember Blake Winslow. He peed his pants like all the time."

He remembered the entire Winslow clan: Mrs. and Mr. Winslow, the owners of the biggest Potions and Magical remedies corporation and their sons, Damien, Link, and Blake, the youngest. Blake, the shrimp of the family who used to cry over anything and everything. He was afraid of the littlest things like lady bugs, the dark and once, his own shadow.

He just couldn't imagine an adult version of that.

"We're sorry darling," Daniel's mother, Adele said from the sofa, bundled up in quilts.

Daniel's father, Etienne stood at the door, grabbing the pillows from the maid and brought them back to his wife, settling them behind her back and neck. He ran his knuckles down her cheek. Daniel's father had more bulk than height and dark cool skin like the blackened char left after a forest fire. His eyes were red from a fresh feeding. Unlike Daniel's mother, still wearing silk lounge clothes,

Etienne wore a gray houndstooth suit tailored to perfection.

Etienne explained, "We didn't think we'd go through with the engagement."

"So, what changed?" Daniel asked. "Why are we even engaged at all?"

#

BLAKE

"500 years ago..." Blake's father, Clay explained as Blake held back his lunch from gushing through his lips. He raised his finger into the air and swirled it around, until the picture of Danny flipped over all on its own, so Danny would stop staring at him. Inside the folder was a picture of the Sagewick castle, a plane ticket and a huge portrait of the entire royal family. Clay stood at the cold fireplace the way he did in all his board meetings with excited hands and big facial features.

"Our families, the Winslow's and the Bellerose's joined together in a contract with a demon. For this deal, the Winslow family was given incredible gifts. Our entire family was taught magic, potion making, and we were even given our first shop."

"That's..." Blake whispered, letting that information sink in. "Nice."

"Nice at a cost."

"What was the cost?" Blake's mouth went dry.

"Before that," Emma said gravely, eyeing her husband first before she went moved on. "You have to understand the consequence of breaking the contract."

The blood in Blake's veins cooled. He couldn't speak, couldn't move his mouth. All he could do was sink into his chair and fiddle with his hands. He strangled the circulation from his thumb. This wasn't what he expected when they brought him back.

"Show him," his mother insisted.

Clay nodded, strolling to one of the candles. He picked one up by its silver neck and brought the wick close to his lips. Blake knew this old trick. It was one of the first things children were taught when they needed to harness their magic. They focus everything on that small little breath and the candle wick bursts into flames.

Clay blew on the candlewick.

Nothing happened.

Blake thought his heart was going to burst through his chest. He said, his words coming out strangled and strange, "That's not funny."

"It's not," his father agreed.

#

DANIEL

"So, the Winslow family will become human?" Daniel asked, seeing if he was keeping up with the plot. He thought about this for a moment. "They'd be ruined. A family of humans couldn't possibly run a company that's sole production is in magical items and potions."

"Clay Winslow has already lost most of his magic," Etienne explained, and it was as if a chill swept through the room. Clay Winslow, to Daniel's memory was an excitable man with enough passion to start a Golden Age of magic and the kind of patience and class that made Daniel want to grow up and be the kind of man that could control the room with a single word.

Daniel felt like he was going crazy. He stood back up and paced by the windows, covered in thick velvet curtains to keep out the sun.

"How did you let it get this far? Weren't there signs? I mean," Daniel threw his hands up. He hated learning about problems when they were piled so high, they had the opportunity to bury him alive. "You had five hundred years to prepare."

"We didn't think it was anything to worry about. I mean," Adele

smiled sheepishly. "We knew the time was coming. I grew up with talk about the curse, about the agreement, but..."

"But you didn't believe in it, did you? But now you believe in the curse? Why?"

"Well, there have been signs. When we had you, my love, we were quite surprised. We weren't even trying. We had you young, younger than either of our families wanted. To some mortals, they could mistake us for siblings."

"If anything," Etienne shrugged. "We were actively trying to avoid having children."

"Thanks."

"It was a blessing."

"Little things happened that seem so much bigger now. When you were younger, around four, you woke up from a nap and you wouldn't stop crying. Even after your tears ran dry, you couldn't stop..."

Daniel's brow narrowed. "You never told me this story."

"We learned later that was the day Blake was born. You cried while Emma went through her labor and only stopped, when Blake was born at midnight. I'll never forget the way you finally calmed down and fell asleep in my arms."

"I think that was the last time you rested," Etienne muttered.

"Why didn't you ever tell me that?"

"We tried to ignore it. You two didn't exactly get along when you were younger."

"Then..." Adele touched her hair, the streak of gray.

All at once, the world caved in around Daniel and he wasn't sure how he could possibly escape.

#

BLAKE

"You mean they're dying?" Blake asked.

"Mortality is catching back up to them," his father explained further. "500 years ago, we were blessed with the gift of magic. They were given immortality and strength. It's not completely clear, but 500 years ago, the Bellerose family became vampires and if the contract breaks, those powers will also disappear. Just like ours."

"To be clear, it wasn't just the average powers bestowed to us. We became titans. They became royalty. Without that help, I don't know if the Winslow family or the Bellerose coven would still exist and now, our families must merge if we want to keep this power going."

"So..." Blake spoke softly, his voice as loud as he could manage. Closing his eyes, he rested his head in his hands. "What does this mean? I'll have to drop out of school and what? Move to Sagewick and live in the castle and wow, I bet this plane ticket isn't a round trip..."

Blake would have to uproot his whole life, leave his family behind and all his plans. He'd become the fiancé of a vampire prince. A fiancé. Then, a *husband*. He'd be getting married at twenty-two, having never been in a serious relationship in his entire life. And could he do it? Be a part of that family? He didn't even know what it took, what it required to be a husband or the kind of husband Danny needed to help run a coven.

Blake was gonna vomit.

"Honey, the lights," Emma whispered, carefully touching his arm.

"Huh?" Blake snapped up in his seat, noticing how dim the lights had gotten. Blake waved his hands by his head and tried shaking off this feeling and the connection to the house's electricity. Magic was like being tied to everything in sight with an unlimited amount of string. Blake had the habit of pulling on those connections without

thinking.

Finally, the lights brightened back up.

"Sorry," Blake said.

A few silent beats went by and Blake knew he needed to answer them. His father's phone buzzed and rang out, scaring Blake, which made all the lights flicker. Blake unloaded a long sigh, even though the weight didn't leave his chest. His father hurried out of the room, speaking low into the phone, "Hello Adele. Yes, we just told him. How's it going on your end?"

Clay escaped the room, breezing past Adrian, still at attention. Blake met his eyes and tried not to look completely devastated. Adrian met his smile and used the backs of his fingers to tap his chin, his silent way of saying "chin up."

Blake straightened his back and faced the table properly again. Somehow the picture of Danny faced him again. Blake remembered Danny's parents in simple ways. Adele and her soft eyes and despite not needing to eat the way Blake did, she always kept his favorite snacks in the kitchen. He recalled the way Etienne made sure Blake's whole family was comfortable in the cold Sagewick castle. He'd do anything for him family. Could Blake do the same?

"We had to send Adrian to find it in one of the old family vaults..." Blake's mother stood up and grabbed something from his father's briefcase he brought into the room before Blake's entire life imploded in on itself. She took out a wooden cylinder with intricate stars and moons carved into the wood. Spindles of coppers than covered it like overgrown vines, caging the beauty inside. Emma popped the copper lid and instantly, a scroll jumped into the air. Unraveling on its own, it fluttered about the room until it crashed landed on the table.

"If you needed any more convincing, we were able to track down the contract. It's indestructible," Emma explained as the paper fluttered in front of Blake's face. The handwriting was in cursive so fancy, Blake could barely make out the words. He could only pick out their family names, letting his eyes drift down to the bottom

where he found a droplet of blood where most people signed a contract.

Only one name appeared in glimmering typography, like the shimmering flecks of a diamond brought to the light. Even without touching the name, Blake could feel the power the same way people hovered their hands over food to check to see if it was scolding hot. This name was on fire.

Ignacio

That must've been the demon.

Why did it enter a deal with their families?

What did a demon get out of a vampire and a wizard marrying?

The reality truly sunk in and Blake knew what he couldn't allow to happen. He couldn't let the Bellerose family fade and die. He couldn't ruin his family's legacy and his brother's future with Winslow Apothecary. Even the people they employed would suffer... all Blake had to do was sacrifice a little freedom. That was something he was already familiar with.

His father returned, his phone still up to his ear. Blake twisted around to look at his father and now that he knew the truth, he could tell that the usual storm of magic inside his father's chest fizzled to a flat can of soda.

Clay looked at his son with concern. "Think about it as long as you need to-" He winced and corrected himself. "Well, not too long, but we understand. It's a big decision-"

"What did Danny say?" Blake asked.

"He said yes. He's willing to do it."

To do it.

He's willing to marry Blake for his family.

Blake took a deep breath. "I don't need to wait. I'll agree to it. I'll

marry Danny."

Emma cried out in relief and tears even pricked at Clay's eyes, making them bright pink and itchy. He wiped the corners of his eyes with Adrian's handkerchief and left to finish his conversation with Danny's mother. Emma came around the table and embraced Blake, running her hands through the back of his head and ruffling his curls. She kissed the middle of his head. "It's all going to be alright. I promise."

All Blake could do was nod.

Through his mother's arms, he could see the scroll, Danny's picture and the plan ticket. It all glared back with such great expectation, enough to cover the lining of his body with lead. He closed his eyes and let all his weight fall into his mother's arms. He wasn't an Oracle. He couldn't predict the future. He just hoped his mother was right, like she always was.

#

Author's Note

Thank you guys for all your support! It means the world to me and I'm excited to keep sharing these stories with you. All comments are appreciated! I've gotta bolt, I'm about to clock back into work! Love you guys!

4. Blake

BLAKE

"Stop laughing," Blake growled at his older brother, Link bending over with a howling cackle. He had to hold onto his sides to keep them from bursting open. Not listening, Link fell out of his desk chair and rocked back and forth.

"It's not funny!" Blake snapped, throwing his hands up in the air. "You, dickwad! I'm marrying Danny for you! I just asked a simple question!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry—it's just my little brother! Never had a date in his life! Engaged! I fucking can't man! Does Damien know? Okay, okay. I'm sorry," Link said, through labored breathing. He wiped a tear from his eye and flicked it at the floor. "Ask me again. Go ahead," he encouraged, still lying flat on his back.

Link was the same age as Danny, twenty-five with round glasses and usually, he wore business casual wear with intricate patterns and quirky ties with socks to match, but at home he wore his navy blue Yale sweatshirt and black gym shorts. Currently, while working at the family business, Link strived for his master's degree in plant biology. He was gangly like the rest of the Winslows, but he's the only one who's cut his curls short.

"I just wanted to know what Danny was like," Blake asked for the second time.

Link's dumb face scrunched up as he mulled it over. It annoyed Blake like crazy that he could look even a little but like his stupid brother. Link shrugged and said, "Well, first off, he doesn't go by Danny anymore. If someone called him that, the whole room might shit a brick. He's a prince, Blake, to a huge coven. It's Daniel. Not Dan. Daniel."

"I don't really care about his name."

"When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow morning," Blake mumbled and crossed his arms. He didn't even want to pack, giving the task to Nancy, a maid that knew him well enough to pack the stuff he liked and leave the stuff he never wore. He didn't want to think about it. Blake changed the subject back to Danny. "Is he any different from how he acted like he was a kid?"

"Oh, yeah," Link nodded, easily swayed as long as he still had the opportunity to run his mouth. "He's so serious. We barely even talk when we run into each other, like we didn't even know each other, like we weren't best friends back in the day. He just waves and gets ushered to the next function or whatever."

"What's going on around here? Why is everyone in such a fuss?"

Damien popped his head into Link's room. The eldest of the Winslow brothers, Damien had an intense maturity surrounding him, which reminded Blake a lot of their mother. Gentle, but intense. He let his curls grow out, probably without realizing it. His silver eyes were darker, stormier and he was the tallest by far.

Damien snapped a look down. "Why are you on the floor?"

Link snorted. "Blake's engaged."

"*Link*," Blake snapped as his face burned red hot.

"You're what?" Damien blinked. A flash of betrayal swept over his eyes that quickly contorted into smoldering fury. His voice grew as he entered the room. "*You're what?"* He slammed the door behind him. The lights flickered. "To who?"

"It's the best part—"

"Link, shut up!" Blake hollered and launched at his brother, struggling to throw his hands over Link's big mouth. Link twisted to escape his hold, but Blake held on with all his might, when Link opened his mouth and slobbered all over Blake's fingers.

"Ugh!" Blake shuddered and released Link's stupid mouth.

"He's engaged to Daniel Bellerose!"

"*That* asshole?"

"Is he an asshole?" Blake asked, his heart slamming into his toes.

"We'll see about this," Damien grumbled. He stomped out of the room, calling for their parents. Damien was the biggest reason Blake never had a chance to date. No matter who Blake introduced them to, they were never good enough in Damien's opinion. They never passed the test. Damien ran most of the boys Blake liked out with some help from Link, who helped mostly for a laugh. Damien insisted he would know if a boy was good enough from one look.

All that didn't matter now.

"Are you okay?" Link asked, making Blake realize he was just laying there, staring at the ceiling. "I mean, I know you're not okay, *okay*, but I just mean... I don't know what I mean."

"I'm fine, really," Blake lied and put on a brave face. Funny that being engaged could make him feel so incredibly lonely.

"Don't listen to Damien. He's not that bad—"

"I don't want to talk about it anymore. Tell me what's going on with you?"

Link hesitated, but something inside of Blake's eyes convinced him to hold back. Link started talking about school and his internship at Winslow Apothecary. His words slowly lost their form and then, the sound all together. Everything blurred around Blake as he dreaded the morning, the plane ride and meeting Danny again.

Daniel.

He had more questions than one person could probably answer.

Eventually, maybe even in the middle of Link talking, Blake excused himself to the outdoor courtyard. He closed his eyes and took a

deep breath, letting the cold inside his chest. His skin prickled at the touch of cold. Night descended around the manor and the garden lights flickered to life, making all the foliage glow. Shivering, he enclosed himself in his arms and tried to pull himself together. Still, the tears pricked. Still, the sadness bubbled over.

All his plans for his future were gone just like that. His dream of independence and seeing the world now had to be a distant memory. It couldn't be his dream anymore. That would be far too painful.

The door to the courtyard whined as someone joined Blake outside.

"It'll be colder in Sagewick," Adrian said, and Blake dropped his chin to his chest, smiling through the ache. Adrian draped a blanket over Blake's shoulders and then, joined his side. "We'll have to buy you a better coat when we get there."

Blake straightened, snapping a look at Adrian to see if he was joking. A sneaky tear rolled down his cheek. Adrian's lips didn't even quiver as he looked out into the garden. He just said, "Did you really think you would go somewhere, and I wouldn't follow?"

A smile appeared on Blake's face, the first real smile all day and despite the bodyguard's stiffness, Blake wrapped his arm around him and squeezed. He let the tears fall and thanked Adrian a million times. Adrian was subdued into relaxing after a while. He stroked Blake's back, not wasting his breath on words. The man never expended more oxygen than necessary.

Eventually, when Blake calmed down, Adrian told him, "I'll always be with you, Blake. Always."

Blake believed him.

If anything, he banked on Adrian helping him navigate this new world. It was Adrian that woke him up the next morning to leave for their plane ride. Usually, witches of their caliber could simply teleport, but there were magnificent wards surrounding the island that kept any sneaky visitors from coming to the island without permission.

Blake's whole family stood outside, awake before the sun even sprung out of bed to say goodbye. Blake couldn't shake the cold and his eyes still itched from exhaustion. He just saw his family again, after so long. He couldn't stand the fact that he was leaving again so soon and so far away too.

"We'll meet you in Sagewick when we can," his mother promised.

"And Link and I will be there for Christmas, hopefully sooner," Damien added.

"Okay," Blake said because what else was he supposed to say? He hugged them all, savoring their warmth and their smell. They smelled like herbs and tea leaves. His mother smelled like fresh basil cut from the garden and Blake had to remind himself he wasn't going somewhere strange. He had been to the castle before. Not in thirteen years, but Blake had to hold onto a least a little bit of optimism.

He wasn't going to be alone, he promised himself.

"Master Blake," Adrian said, opening the car door for Blake.

The car hummed with life and Blake's stomach twisted as he clutched his bags a little tighter. He couldn't make his legs move. Without Adrian guiding him, he might have never gotten into the car. This time, someone else drove and Adrian sat right next to him, reading the paper and giving Blake plenty of quite time to freak out.

All the way to the airport, Blake picked at his fingernails and the skin there. Out of nowhere, Adrian laid his hand over Blake's fingers, warning him, "Stop it before you break your skin. You don't want to start bleeding, sir."

Blake opened his mouth to ask why, but he knew why.

Swallowing back the sick bubbling up at the top of his throat, he slid his hands underneath his thighs to avoid temptation. It'd be bad to attract more unwanted vampire attention than necessary. Blake's skin tingled as he imagined fangs biting through flesh and the marble bloom of blood and the heat of their breath and the smell of

copper and Blake's stomach acids curdled and soured.

Soon, they came upon the airport, but they didn't stop to find parking like Blake expected. He turned his body every which way and back, warning the driver. "Um, I'm sorry sir, but we missed the exit back there—"

"He's going the right way," Adrian assured him as he slid his newspaper into his jacket pocket, taking out their passports instead. Blake watched outside the windows in awe as they drove directly onto the ramp towards a huge aircraft hangar, which was way bigger up close than he ever imagined. Blake's mouth dropped unconsciously, making Adrian chuckle a little.

In the middle of the hangar was a long, sleek private jet. It was steel black that faded with harsh lines into a deep red. On the wing, Blake recognized the Bellerose family cress, an intricate design with a rose in the center of thorns and black snakes with long fangs.

The driver got out of the car, opening Blake's door for him. Then, he bowed? No, Blake was just seeing things. The guy probably needed to crack his back or something. As the driver began to unload their luggage and hand it off to the baggage handlers from the airport, Adrian guided Blake to the woman that was obviously the pilot, dressed in a black suit with four golden stripes around the cuff of her blazer. Her dark hair was fastened into a long ponytail underneath her pilot's hat.

She smiled upon seeing them, slapping Blake across the face with her beauty, the striking cut of her cheek bones, her chiseled jaw and full plump lips. He only saw women like this, but after they were thoroughly photoshopped. Blake didn't swing that way, but she made an excellent argument with one smile.

"You must be the Winslow party. My name is Captain Holst." she spoke and even her accent didn't seem real, so smooth and deep. "I've been flying for the Royal Coven for quite some time and I am honored to be your pilot. It shall mark an important moment in my career."

She even curtsied, alongside the flight attendant and Blake

straightened in surprised. He glanced behind his shoulder, just to make sure that was for him. It was.

Adrian handed her their passports, letting Captain Holst double check them. She nodded. "Everything seems to be in order. We shall take off within fifteen minutes, your highness."

Blake pointed to his chest, blinking a mile a minute. "Me? I'm his highness." Like a kid, he looked up at Adrian, double checking if that was even allowed. The flight attendant giggled behind her hand, unable to contain herself.

Thankfully, the Captain smiled warmly. "You'll have to get used to that."

She winked and rounded the crew up, before boarding the plane. Blake felt like he just slipped on the beach and the water dragged him into the ocean, where he flipp around the inside of its belly. He found himself inside the jet, amazed by the couches, the TV and a table with comfortable chairs. As soon as Blake sat down, the flight attendant handed him a Mimosa.

"I'll take coffee," Adrian waved his drink away. "Black."

"Right away, sir. My name is Molly. I shall serve breakfast after take off. If there's anything else you require, just ask," she said in a similar accent to the Captain's that Blake couldn't place. It wasn't quite British. Not quite German or Danish. Something in between.

Oh, Blake realized, *It was the Sagewick accent.*

"Do you want to sleep? There's a bed in the back," Adrian motioned to the back of the plane and Blake's eyes nearly popped out and plopped into his drink. He smirked, dropping one of his rare moments of humor, "We're just going to have to suffer here for ten hours."

"There's a bed too? Adrian, I think I'm way in over my head." Blake took a swig of his Mimosa and it was of course, the best mimosa he has ever had in life. Not just orange juice, but something else and just as rich as sweet. The champagne tickled his nose as he drank.

"It's like the Captain said, you just have to get used to it."

Blake wiped his mouth with his sleeve. "I don't think I can."

"You must."

That was right. There was no going back now.

In less than fifteen minutes, just as the Captain promised, they drove onto the ramp and took off into the sky. Blake watched through the window as his home shrunk smaller and smaller. Definitely too late to bail now, unless he wanted to become a wizard pancake. This was just the plane ride to Sagewick. He couldn't possibly grasp what was waiting for him when they landed.

#

Author's Note

Here's a quick little update! I'm happy to introduce the rest of the Winslow family. This might be my first character since Eric (from The Golden Rule) who has siblings and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. Sad that we're leaving them behind. But they'll be back for the wedding ;) ;) Maybe. Who knows! We gotta a lot of book left.

This was a fun one. What did you think about Link and Damien's reactions? If you were Blake, how would you be feeling? Also, how much would you freak out over a private jet? Are you excited to reach Sagewick? Do you have any guesses about Blake and Daniel's first meeting?

All comments are appreciated and don't forget to like the chapter! Add it to your library in order to keep up with updates every Monday!

And if you like this book, check out my collection of werewolf novels that are also full of romance, comedy and lots of drama.

5. Blake

BLAKE

The plane landed at the Sagewick airport and the icy breeze numbed Blake's face within seconds. Nobody lied about Sagewick's winter season, but they definitely held back the whole truth. Stepping off the plane was like opening the door to a walk-in freezer and rolling around on the floor.

Taking off his jacket, Adrian draped it over Blake's shoulder. When Blake tried to refuse, Adrian stated, "I don't think I'd give the Bellerose family a great first impression, if I'm letting my charge turn blue from the cold."

And Blake guessed he didn't want his teeth chattering when he met Danny again. Still, Blake felt a coil of guilt tighten around his chest. He pinched a piece of Adrian's shirt and whispered a small enchantment, something to warm the cloth. Almost immediately, the color in Adrian's face turned a much prettier color.

"You're too kind, sir."

When they were all ready, Blake followed Adrian through the terminal. Again, they passed through the usual checks with more ease than what was normal. Thankfully, less people were bowing time. The airport wasn't particularly packed, so it was easy to maneuver around the bodies. As they reached the exit, a slender man stood with a sign that read:

Blake Winslow

The man was young, but in Sagewick that could be deceptive. He may look nineteen, but he could really be closer to one hundred or more. When Blake was a kid, his mother used to drill into him that he should be incredibly polite in Sagewick and to show the upmost respect to everyone just in case. They hold manners in the highest regard.

"That's me." Blake raised his hand.

"Is that so?" The man titled his head.

His styled blonde hair didn't budge, and he wore a black suit with a slim tie and a leather backpack. Suddenly, Blake picked at his sweatshirt, brushing off the last of the croissant crumbs from breakfast. Just like the pilot, this guy had miraculously flawless skin and a tidy appearance. His eyes were a vibrant shade of blue, which reminded Blake not to stare so long, the same way a snake's colors could warn someone of their poison.

A vampire's eyes had the ability to mesmerize a person and even hypnotized them into submission. Some vampires did it unconsciously, if they weren't paying attention well enough.

"Well, I'm always prepared, even for surprises."

"Where's Danny- I mean, Daniel?"

The man cracked a smile. "Unfortunately, his highness was whisked off to a meeting. I'm Michael, his assistant. Not Mike. Not Mikey."

"Michael." I nodded.

"Let's go before—"

Michael was cut off by a woman's shouting, "Wait! Wait! Wait!"

A tall woman, all sharp features and edges galloped at the group, towering in her high heel boots. Her long white coat fluttered behind her like a cape as she clutched her small leather purse. She wore a long chunky white sweater with a loose turtleneck. She had cool black skin like she was a piece of shattered the night sky while her silky black hair spilled down her shoulders, all the way to her elbows.

This million-foot-tall gorgeous model smacked Michael with her leather handbag. "I said wait. You were going to leave without me, weren't you?" She had the same slightly British accent as everybody else, but a bit angrier than Blake had heard so far. Her eyes flickered at him and as her entire face brightened, Blake jumped.

Her attention felt like a prick of electricity.

"Oh my!" The woman gawked. "You smell amazing!"

"Huh?" was all Blake could come up with.

Michael sighed. He raised his hand, presenting the woman like it was as troublesome as dragging a car down the road with his teeth. "This is Josephine Bellerose-"

"I'm Daniel's cousin!" Josephine added and threw her arms around Blake. She pulled him into a tight and quick hug, raising the poor wizard to his tip toes. "We're so happy to have you! I can't believe my cousin is getting married!"

"Ssh!" Michael hissed. He yanked her off and they both stumbled, but Adrian caught Blake by his shoulder. "Do you want everyone in Sagewick to know? We can't let it slip before the press conference tomorrow?"

All the blood drained from Blake's face, leaving his body cold and clammy. "Press-" His voice cracked, so Blake swallowed and started again. He blinked like crazy as his brain struggled to understand the situation. "Press conference?"

Michael's grimace deepened. "My apologies, sir. The King and Queen were planning to tell you." He smacked Josephine's arm and she laughed.

"I'm just excited, Michael! Can you blame me?" She strung her arm around Blake's, pulling him along, through the airport. "You probably don't remember me. You were just a little boy when we last met. It was Christmas..." She looked up at the ceiling, where answers preferred to hide. "Gosh, it's so hard to keep up with the years. But let me just say, you have grown up to be so handsome and you smell so good."

"Thank you?"

"Stop telling him that," Michael grumbled from behind. "Humans don't like that."

"Why?" Josephine genuinely asked.

"Guess." Michael rolled his eyes.

"It's a compliment! Blake knows it's a compliment! Don't you, Blake?"

"Uh," Blake said, gurgling his awkwardness in the middle of his throat as his face grew warmer and warmer. "I guess?"

"Daniel's so lucky." Josephine sighed. "Why isn't a cute human falling into my lap? What happened to your brothers? Are they still single?"

"I'm leaving you in the car with the windows up next time," Michael muttered.

They left the airport and climbed into a black Bentley that looked new and shiny. Blake half wondered if they bought a new car every time they needed to take a long drive. Was there someone at the castle to wash and wax every car the moment they arrived home?

Blake wished he could've hidden his yellowed shoes.

He wished someone could've warned him everyone here dressed like a model at fashion week.

This car might spit Blake back up for daring to sweatpants. For now, it accepted his presence as Josephine and Blake sat in the back seat, while Michael drove, and Adrian sat with him in the front. Michael handed Adrian a binder, explaining schedules, events and all things that were now a part of Blake's calendar. Not really Adrian's job, but Blake didn't have an assistant.

"Can you tell me more about the press conference?" Blake asked past the massive lump in his throat. Since it was mentioned, Blake hasn't been able to stop sweating.

"Oh, it's just an easy little announcement about the upcoming nuptials. You'll just have to gush over Daniel and lie about how handsome and charming he can be and whatever else the press will just eat up. This will really help Daniel's likability," she said, having

just realized it.

"I'll have to speak?"

Michael met his eyes through the rearview mirror. "Don't worry. We have people that will tell you what to say."

Blake's worries only inflated. He gawked, feeling the world moving too fast beneath him. "I'm going to have to memorize *lines*?"

"Trust me, if they don't think you can do it, they'll give you like maybe one or two things to say. And then," She held my hand and I desperately tried to hide my shudder at her icy touch. Her bones felt like ice. Her warm smile confused me. The light in her eyes confused me. "You can come visit me at my club, the Verona. It's the best club in the city for mortal and vampire alike."

"Still not as comforting as you think," Michael muttered.

Josephine reached over in a flash, faster than Blake could blink and smacked Michael's arm.

#

Michael dropped Josephine off in the city, who met up with three huge dudes that must've been her own bodyguards. Blake could tell not only by their build, but the unflinching expression behind their sunglasses. A gaggle of girls in school uniforms immediately recognized Josephine as a Bellerose and asked for a picture.

She snapped the door shut before anyone could spy inside the car and see Blake.

They left for the castle, driving up the spiraling road up the mountain. Blake watched as a dark cloud veiled the droves of trees covered in fresh white snow. Droplets of hail quickly turned into a full storm that caused a groan to rumble out Michael's throat.

"This means no one is going to be outside to help us grab the luggage."

"That's okay," Blake insisted as he wrapped himself deeper into

Adrian's jacket. Simply looking outside frosted his bones with ice. "I really don't have a lot."

Still, Michael grumbled. "It's just not appropriate."

"We're coming up on the castle," Adrian said as the car turned another corner.

Blake's jaw unhinged. From the bottom of the mountain and across town, Blake could see the castle and from that far away, it just looked like ashen shapes and pointy roofs. As a kid, he never really paid attention to the exterior, more concerned with the snacks in the kitchen and getting to pick his room before Link or Damien.

"I never realized how..." Blake said unconsciously out loud. "How grand it all is..."

For whatever reason, he never thought that this was a real castle with unbelievably tall towers made of white stone and too many floors to count. They passed through the gates and the arches, all wrapped in tinsel, baubles and huge wreaths for the Christmas season. Men stood guard at every doorway, even though the hail pelted them like raining bullets.

"Game plan! I pop the trunk and then, we race inside." Michael drove right up to the stone steps.

"You," Adrian unbuckled and pointed at Blake. "Go inside."

"I'm helping," Blake said and popped his hood over his head. He rushed out of the car, surprised to see the front doors fly open and a gaggle of maids dashed down the steps. The trunk opened and while Blake grabbed a bag, so did a dozen other hands and a laugh flew out of his mouth, which caused some of the maids to cackle along with him.

They raced back up the steps and into the entrance. Ice had clung to the bottom of Blake's shoes and the second his foot hit the marbled checkered floor, he went sliding, arms flailing. Of course, Adrian was there in the next split second to grab him. Blake just laughed.

The maids were abuzz about the hail and their clothes and Michael

still out there causing a fuss. Blake caught his breath and walked out of Adrian's grip, slowly walking deeper into entrance. He stared up at a wide staircase with a red rug running up the very middle.

The stairs deviated to both sides and suddenly, the grandness of it all was overwhelming. He could feel the space of the castle. Blake was surrounded by artwork and statues and the kind of furniture that looked like art as if a museum security guarded was going to drop from the ceiling and yell at him for sitting on a couch. Blake tried peeking through a nearby door, spotting a grand piano.

"I wonder what the new prince will be like?" A maid daydreamed aloud from the three, and Blake whirled around. He watched her swat the snow out of her hair red hair.

Another, an older one stuck her nose back outside. "Do you think he's driving up separate?"

"I bet he's handsome."

"He must be interesting to have caught Prince Daniel's eye. He never strays from work. When did he even have time to date?"

Blake started walking towards them, but they didn't seem to notice. He caught Adrian's eye who actually smiled, which to Adrian was like rolling on the floor with laughter. A butler came from the wings with a baggage cart to help Adrian gather Blake's things.

"Oh, I put ten dollars in the pot that it's an arranged marriage," the first maid said.

"What was his name again?"

"Uh," Blake spoke up just as the maid scurried away from the doors to let Michael inside. A gust of frigid wind nearly knocked everyone over. The maids quickly fell into a line by the door, holding their hands in front of them with their shoulders rolled back.

"Okay, ladies," Michael spoke, his voice echoing through these halls. He held out his hands towards me and Blake suddenly felt the urge to stand a bit straighter and fix his hair. All four eyes found Blake and they just blinked at him. "This is Blake Winslow. I expect you

three to be on your best behavior, now that it's his home. I know things are moving fast but you're all just going to have to keep up. Help Blake whenever he needs it. Provide anything he asks..."

About here, the maids finally put everything together.

And all the blood drained from their faces.

"Oh, and I almost forgot. For the sake of decency, he will be staying in the rose suite until after the wedding—" Michael's attention flickered as he reached into his pocket for his cellphone. The man sighed with his entire being, down to his soul and answered, "Hello, Frances. I'm so glad you found enough brain cells to call me back...." He started walking for one of the dozen doors in this room alone, grumbling at this Frances person. "If you don't bring me back my prince by tonight, I will personally disembowel you and feed you to the strays."

The door slammed behind him.

Blake rubbed his neck, glancing back at the line of horrified maids. One of the girls, a young red head that suddenly bent over and blurted, "We're so sorry, sir! I think I can speak for the other girls when I say we're so embarrassed!"

"Oh! It's okay! Really!" Blake raised his hands, getting all flustered too. "We've never met before. I mean, how would you have known?"

The older maid nodded in agreement. "I'm sorry, sir. I've just never met a prince in sweatpants." With that, the color of Blake's burned so hot he was probably left with some scars.

The redhead smacked her arm, but Blake tried to just laugh through it. Then, a voice finally saved him from this torture.

"Blake!"

From the right wing, her royal highness herself, Queen Adele drifted down the stairs in layers of flowing fabric and fluttering feathers around the edges and on her slippers. She was dressed for a day of lounging and rest and she still looked better than Blake. She looked hand carved from marble and painted midnight black. Her

coiled curls bounced as she descended the steps with her arms out and raised to find Blake. Another horde of maids chased after her.

"Oh, my goodness! You're an adult! I haven't seen you in so long!" She wrapped Blake up in a hug. For the first time, Blake could exhale. He held her back, letting himself melt into her cool embrace. In some ways, she's so much smaller than he remembered. Not only in height, realizing he was a few inches taller than her, but she was the skinniest he had ever seen Adele.

"Look at you!" She leaned back, blinding Blake with her smile and dimples. She touched his face, her wedding band, biting his cheek like an ice cube. "I can't believe you're here, my sweet Blake. I'm so unbelievably happy to see you." She sighed, breathlessly and caressed his cheek. "I can't thank you enough."

Blake held her wrists back, trying to ward off the tears. "I'm happy to see you too..." He leaned closer, speaking low. Not that it'd matter in a room full of vampires. "Are you okay?"

"I'll be fine."

Yeah, she'll be fine as long as Blake marries her son.

Then, no one has to turn to dust.

Adele strung her arm around his and started leading him up the stairs. "I'll show you to your room, my dear. I asked your mother about all your favorite foods. You and I are going to dine in your room and catch up. I want to know everything about your life! What have I missed? How are your brothers...?"

As she went on, Blake could hear one of the maids say, "I'm so surprised. He seems so... ordinary." She said it in a way that wasn't meant to be an insult, but her disappointment echoed in these lush halls. Blake wasn't the princely type that they were expecting that they wanted. He could feel all the excitement leave the room.

Blake squeezed Adele's arm and followed her to his room. They spent hours catching up and swapping stories. She explained that the announcement tomorrow was happening fast because

everything was going to be happening fast. With the curse deadline incoming, they had until the last day of the year to get married. She promised that Daniel would do most of the talking.

She retired to her own room, leaving Blake alone with the photo albums she left behind. All those memories felt more like a dream. Blake looked up at his room that felt more like a boujee hotel room with his satin sheets on a king-sized bed. His room had its own crackling fireplace and huge windows, framed by heavy ornate curtains. There was a small lounge and a wardrobe that a maid stuffed with all his worldly belongings.

Blake turned to the back of the newest album and stared at a recent picture of Danny. It looked like he didn't notice someone was taking his picture as he spoke to someone out of frame. A half smile pinched the side of his face...

Blake frowned.

"Okay," Blake had to admit it. "He's really... hot."

Sweat pooled inside of Blake's palms as a knot formed in his chest. It was kind of annoying that punk kid from his childhood became such a... *man.* Everything about Danny seemed sturdy like the foundation of a house. He seemed strong from his features, his wide shoulders and that muscular build. He looked like the guy on romance novel covers, holding up half-naked maidens with one arm and a sword in the other. This was what the maids thought of when they thought of a prince. Danny looked like the kind of guy that had men and women falling at his feet.

Blake sighed and the fire suddenly snuffed out, letting the cold creep inside. "Damn." Blake slumped against his couch as the exhaustion from the day sunk into his skin. He took a deep breath, resting his eyes for just a moment. He still needed to look over his schedule for tomorrow and meet Danny all over again.

But that night, his fatigue won out and he melted inside the couch.

#

Author's Note

Oh man. *Whew!* It's been a second. My life has been a little crazy. I participated in Pitch Wars, started prepping for my Nanowrimo novel, changed jobs and actually outlined this book. Having a book fully outlined makes me feel WAY more confident diving in.

This book has been Daniel light, but don't worry ;) He'll be back very, very soon. So! Don't forget to leave a comment and tell me what you think! What do you think about Michael and Josephine? Do you think Blake is ever gonna catch a break? And did anyone recognize the name Frances? Hehehe.

6. Blake

BLAKE

"On the stupid scale, where do I rank?" Blake asked Adrian, raising his arms out. "From one to ten, I'm like an eleven, right?" He waved his arms and legs, wagging the extra fabric of his clothes, hanging off his limbs. He'd take the blazer off, if it weren't for the sweat stain pooled underneath his armpits.

Blake Winslow was freaking out.

More than a little bit.Maybe he was crazy, but to him, breakfast was five minutes ago. In truth, hours had gone by, but he still felt like he teleported to this spot in the castle. An opulent sitting room with ornamental trim and a mural of flowers painting on the ceiling. The lounges and seats were emerald green and all the trimmings were golden among the hunks of vintage furniture, which was not limited to a grandfather clock, an easel and even an empty bird cage.

Blake stood in front of an ornate floor length mirror and tried practicing his lines, but he didn't know how to avoid blushing like this or how to stop sweating. He could hardly keep his voice steady.

"Josephine will back soon with a change of clothes," Adrian reminded Blake for the hundredth time. Somehow, Blake grabbed Damien's suit when he packed yesterday morning, which fit like he was seven and threw on his father's suit to play pretend.

Well, it was better than being naked.

That would really turn this day into more of a nightmare.

"I'm having a stroke," Blake said and then, took a gulp of his mimosa left over from breakfast. To fill time, Blake just ordered more drinks. This didn't conjure Danny, however.

He checked his phone while Adrian shook his head and answered a knock on the door. There were no messages. Blake cursed and opened his phone just to make sure. Still nothing. His chest tightened, making it difficult to breathe.

Danny missed breakfast, so they pushed it to a brunch.

He missed that too.

The heat in Blake's face trickled to his neck and he finally gave up and threw his blazer over the fancy couch and decorative gold and white pillows. Bouquets of flowers crowded the room and made it twice as small. They congratulated Blake and Daniel on their engagement. It was announced this morning, in preparation of the press conference that started...

Blake checked his watch.

Thirty minutes ago.

The truly eager businesses in town thought fast and sent engagement presents, hoping to become a part of the future celebration. A horrible thought dawned on Blake that he'd actually have to plan a wedding and soon. Groaning, Blake fell face first into one of the loungers, letting his script flutter to the floor. He let all his frustrations rattled out of throat, but somehow didn't feel even a little better.

He checked his phone.

Nothing.

"Danny," Blake whispered and watched another minute fly by. "Where are you?"

Adrian walked up to the back of the chair, making Blake perk up. His sullen face fell lower. "I'm sorry to say sir, but it seems the press is getting restless."

"What does that mean?" Blake asked, but he already knew the answer. His stomach formed unfixable knots as he gripped the nearest pillow for dear life. It was the saddest excuse for a shield. "I

can't go out there alone."

"Blake!" Daniel's mother, Adele flew into the room, wearing a flowy satin dress with long sleeves. The fabric drifted as she moved as if she were weightless. "I'm terribly sorry about this! Usually, Daniel is more punctual for press events. I'm so embarrassed."

"It's not your fault."

"I know, I know, but still-" Her brow stayed furrowed as the door opened again. Blake's heart flourished until he saw Daniel's father, Eitienne appear and Blake's heart crumbled to dust. Eitienne is just as Blake remembered him, the man frozen in time and just as gorgeous as his wife. He wore a black suit with a grey sweater, meant to match his wife.

"Blake!" Etienne walked a little faster, when he spotted him. He practically tackled him into a hug. "It's good to see you. Don't be nervous. Everything is going to be fine." He raised the most unconvincing thumbs up in the world. Blake wanted to throw up all over his shoes in response, but he was too nervous to even vomit.

He wasn't ready. He needed a different suit. He needed more time to prepare.

He needed to have at least one stupid conversation with his fiancé.

"We're going to try to wait a little longer," Adele explained. "But we can't wait forever. The second Daniel gets here, we might just have to throw you both out there. Etienne will go out first and try to stall." She sighed harshly and reached into her husband's pockets, searching and muttering, "We were going to do this during breakfast, but what can we do now?"

She emerged with a small black box and placed it into Blake's hands.

"This is for you, my dear. It's been in our family since the very beginning."

Blake looked at the box. He looked back at her and waited for more information. It wasn't registering quite yet.

The door flung open again and a distressed woman poked her head through, looking at Etienne as if her whole life depended on it. "Your Majesty!" She blurted. "I don't know how much longer I can keep them waiting."

"I'm coming out," Etienne assured her with a sigh.

Grabbing Blake's arm, Adele gave him a little squeeze for encouragement and left with the King. The door clicked shut, leaving Blake alone again. He walked over to the couch and dropped down, staring at the box in his hands, feeling like the weight of the world. His hand trembled as he finally worked up the courage to flip the lid.

Sitting in a bed of velvet sat a ring.

It was a shining golden band, warped to look like two snakes with their mouths wide open and holding two small emeralds. At least, small in comparison to the huge blue sapphire in the middle. The shine from this ring burned Blake's eyes as his soul left his body. Slowly, he took the ring out of the box and his hands moved on their own, sliding it down his ring finger.

A perfect fit.

"Wow," Blake muttered, miserably. "I didn't think I'd have to put on my own engagement ring." He sniffed, keeping the waterworks at bay. Blake was overwhelmed with the day, the place and the heavy ring on his finger. He dropped his face in his hands, feeling so completely alone in the world, he couldn't stand it.

Great. Now, the press was going to get to see his horrible sticky and hot crying face.

From another door, in the back of the room, a tall Asian woman emerged, talking as if she was already in the middle of a conversation. She wore a vintage little black dress that flared out, paired with long white gloves, pearls and a huge wide brim hat as if she was hired as an Audrey Hepburn double for the event. The phone in her hand looked out of place among the old-world décor.

"Well! I have just been notified by Frances that they're on their way so you can say I've saved the day-!" She stopped short, noticing Blake on the coach.

Too much in shock, he stopped crying. Only one more tear slipped down his cheek.

"Who are you?" She asked, tossing her phone in her clutch. "What's going on?"

"I'm uh, Blake. The fiancé."

"Oh! How exciting!" She clapped her hands together, scurrying around the coach. Everything she said had an air of opulence, like everything she said was the greatest thing she's ever said in her life. "Then, you must be Blake Winslow. I adore your family." She raised her hand and Blake quickly stood up to accept her handshake. "My name is Delphine Kelly."

That name combined with her innate energy helped Blake figure out exactly who she was. "Really? Delphine Kelly, the Oracle?"

"The matchmaker," she boasted with a smile as mischievous as the Cheshire Cat. "You're quite handsome. I'm only slightly hurt you no longer need my services, but it is difficult to do better than a prince."

Oracles were like Blake, like witches, except they had the power to see into the past, the present and future. Usually, they held swanky jobs in covens, wolf packs and councils, but Delphine Kelly used her ability to help other creatures find romance. The Winslow family had a close relationship with her business, offering potions and charms for their clients at a discount.

With their special abilities, they're horrid at any other magical practices.

"Um, thank you? It's great to meet you, but what are you doing here?"

"My dear friend, Frances has your prince and they have just arrived outside and are incoming. It seems Frances didn't want a lecture

from someone's assistant or whoever, so he tasked me with the announcement. Unfortunately, I need to leave so I don't miss my flight back home."

"Sorry to hear that-"

"Care to make it up to me?" She asked, but as she was already making her request, she pulled off her gloves and wiggled her fingers. "I'd love a peek."

"A peek?"

"Just a quick little look at the future. I promise not to spoil a thing."

Tentatively, Blake offered his hand with his new engagement ring. "Thank you, darling," she said with a little wiggle in her shoulders and held his hand up between them. Electricity popped in the air, crackling and making Blake's baby hairs stand on edge. She closed her eyes and slowly, her skin brightened and sparkled like the sun hitting the ocean. Despite the brightness, Blake couldn't tear his eyes away.

Delphine titled her head as she was just handed a problem and couldn't figure out the answer. Not without reaching deeper. Her hands didn't loosen. A small tingling sensation trickled down his arms and raised an army of goosebumps. It was like a door to his soul cracked open and Delphine let a breeze inside.

"Is everything okay?" Blake asked, his nerves getting the best of him.

"It's just..." Delphine spoke breathlessly as if she were alone and talking to herself. "I've never met someone who's past pulled me in so intensely..."

"Really? Cause my life has been boring-"

Blake's words caught in his throat as a tear trickled down Delphine's porcelain cheek. The bottom of his stomach fell out and his eyes snapped wide open. "Oh, God. Please tell me you're crying because I was just crying?"

He just prayed she wasn't crying over his future.

Delphine's eyes opened and her tears made her gooey brown eyes sparkle. Her red lips spread into a warm smile that only confused Blake more. Was what she saw good or bad? He needed to know. She reached up and touched his cheek, basking in his face.

"I can't say much, but I will say this. You have been loved for a very long time..." She suddenly pulled him into a warm hug, a deep embrace that Blake had been craving ever since he stepped off the plane. He held her back and imagine his own mother.

Stepping away, Delphine still held onto his arms with a little wink. "Like I said, I won't spoil a thing, but a good tip for curing a hangover is raw eggs. You'll thank me later."

She pecked his cheek and like a storm, she left her wreckage behind and disappeared.

"What just happened?" Blake asked the empty room. He caught his appearance in the mirror and sighed. He still looked like a mess. He curled his hands into fists and counted to ten, steadying his breathing. Time to get it together.

Hopping up, Blake grabbed Damien's blazer and put it back on as he strode up to the mirror. Magic was a funny thing. It was a whirlpool, constantly in motion inside of his heart like this completely separate living thing that decided his soul was a good enough home. He pulled from that power. Just a thread.

Enough for him to shake his arms out and the fabric shrunk. He rolled his shoulders and kicked his legs, doing everything to make this simple black suit fit to his form. However, a cost came with magic. Something needed to be sacrificed so he watched the black color fade to gray.

Blake thought, that would just have to do.

He could buy Damien a new suit later.

Fixing his tie, he thought about calling Michael to relay Delphine's message, when he heard two voices gaining closer. Two voices he

didn't quite recognize. They were both deep, definitely men and they spoke quick harsh words.

Then.

One man said, "Daniel. Come on. We're already late."

Blake's hair stood on edge. His feet swiftly made for that door, ready to grab that Daniel Bellerose by the scruff of his neck and refuse to be ignored.

#

Author's Note

Ah, the love of my life Delphine Kelly has had her moment (though we might see her again ;) Maybe). What does her premonition mean??? Gosh, I have some plans for this book. I will read all theories below and not answer anything, but might leave a winking emojii. I just like getting a peek into your brains.

Remember to leave a comment below and vote on the chapter. If you like my writing style, check out my other books. I have Three completed and they're all stand alones :))

7. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

For the last few days, Daniel stayed away from the castle as if a fearsome creature lurked the halls. He moved constantly, traveling to parties and meetings he'd normally avoid as if someone was chasing after him. Daniel was definitely running. Not from a thing. Not from a monster.

He ran from the inevitable.

Avoiding reality with one meeting at a time.

He hadn't planned on any of this, the curse or the engagement and he didn't know how to handle drifting into the unknown. His assistant, Michael must have figured that out because he sent Frances Petrovic with a set schedule and a timer to bring him back when needed. Frances was the Prince to another coven back in the States, who had more time on his hands than needed since his younger brother, Collin took his fiancé and the crown.

Not that Frances wanted either of those things.

That morning, Daniel did get up to go back home and meet with Blake again, but when he sat in the back of the car, he told the driver to take them to another hotel. He arranged a meeting on the way in secret.

He missed brunch too.

Finally, the upset stomach he suffered from the last few days turned into a painful ache. The weight on his shoulders doubled and he knew he wasn't making the right decisions. That wasn't like him. Daniel didn't know this guy. He didn't like this guy at all, which was more than a little aggravating.

A phone call from his mother finally put him in the car to take him

home. She basically said if he ever wanted to speak to her again, he'd come home that very second.

Daniel avoided reporters by sneaking through the kitchens. Taking one step outside into the hall, he stiffened, and double checked his pockets. He forgot one of his cell phones in the car. He called after Frances, "Wait, Frances. I need to go back-"

Slowly, Frances turned around like it physically pained him. Everything about Frances read like he just rolled out of bed the morning after a long night of partying and wild sex with his dark tussled hair and bedroom eyes. Even his voice sounded rough and low, "Daniel Bellerose, don't make me embarrass you in front of all these people and drag you up those stairs."

"I forgot my phone."

"You have your phone!" He slammed his hands with painted black nails on his narrow hips. He wore half a suit, the actual blazer and pants, but he wore a black shirt and let the top buttons stay unbuttoned. He reminded me of a tired black cat, rolling out of a sunspot on the floor.

"My other phone."

"You know..." Frances squinted. "Every time you say that, you sound like a douche bag and that's coming from me."

"Leave me alone," Daniel sighed. He trudged past Frances, forcing his legs down the marble hall and towards the stairs. The pair of their dress shoes echoed and bounced through the emptiness. "I'm stressed out."

"You'll be fine. How do you think I feel? I'm officially the last single guy in my friend group. It's pathetic. I'm always the third wheel."

"How did you possibly make this about you? And don't you have a matchmaker friend?"

"Yeah, but I can't let her help me or I'll have to undead myself. Besides," Frances rolled his eyes and pushed through the double doors to the stairs.

The boys went up the first flight, covered in a red and gold runner. We passed portrait after portrait of Daniel's family, his distant relatives and his ancestors. They all watched him. They judged him.

Daniel loosened his tie.

Frances insisted. "You're set now, Daniel Bellerose. You've been set up with a Winslow. That's old magic. Old money. And I've met Damien and Link, they're hot as hell. If only a little bit of those genetics slipped to that Blake guy, at least you'll have something good to look at for the rest of our dark eternity."

"No, it's different." Daniel shook his head. "Damien and Link have always looked like that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Blake looked like a newborn deer. Gangly and awkward and I just remember him crying all the time-"

"You didn't ask for a picture? That would've been my first and number one request."

"I didn't think about it, Frances. I haven't been really thinking clearly at all. My mind's blank." Daniel sighed again, feeling incredibly exhausted from these two flights. No, it wasn't the stairs. It was the last three days. It was this conversation.

A pinging noise jumped out of France's pocket. He whipped out his phone and groaned. "Michael's texting me again. He's gonna throw me out the closest window. But how am I supposed to wrangle you? I don't even have my own life together."

Daniel snapped his fingers into the shape of a gun. "Michael. Date Michael."

"What?" Frances stopped at the top of the stairs. "I can't. For obvious reasons."

Daniel stopped too. "What reasons? I can feel the tension."

"Yeah, the kind of tension between a murderer and their victim.

Michael's married, dude."

"No, he's not." Daniel's brows narrowed. He couldn't connect what Frances was saying to his reality. Not a single word made sense. He'd know if Michael was married. Wouldn't he? It would've come up by now, after years of working together.

"Yeah, how do you not know that? His husband is your head chef?"

"You're pulling my leg."

"They're mates. He's a werewolf. Are you fucking with me?"

"No, you're definitely fucking with me."

Daniel decided to walk away. He couldn't handle anymore surprises or he might just explode. He was only a foot from the sitting room, the room the family usually used as a waiting room before they spoke to the press, a makeshift green room, when Daniel's phone vibrated. A wave of relief washed over him. Yes, another reason to stall.

He answered immediately, turning away from the door. "Hello? This is Daniel Bellerose." It was a member of Daniel's future council and when the council member asked if Daniel was busy, he said, "Not at all."

He walked deeper into the hall, towards the window that looked out into the snow-covered mountains. Anything to get away from that sitting room door. Frances groaned, "Daniel. Come on. We're already late."

#

BLAKE

Blake reached for the handle, but the door already opened to reveal a tall man in a slinky black suit and pointy shoes. He jumped when he saw Blake as if he was the one that was supposed to be shocked. The man did a double take from Blake to behind his shoulder.

"I'm looking for Daniel," Blake said, his patience as thin as wax

paper. "Where is he?"

"Oh wow," the man grinned a lopsided smile. His eyes darkened and just the velvet nature of his voice prickled Blake's skin. Anyone could tell he was a vampire, turning on the charm. He leaned against the frame, casting Blake in his shadow. "I'll be your Daniel."

Blake narrowed his eyes, so annoyed, it was almost laughable. "Are you sure you want to be my Daniel? Because the Daniel I know is going to get a stake through his chest."

"Actually, you know what? I'm Frances," the guy raised his hands and took a step out of Blake's way. He pointed down the hall. "He's over there- but he's on a phone call right now."

"I don't care." Blake shoved past and spotted Daniel in front of a window. His chest tightened, almost in disbelief they're actually in the same room. Blake took a deep breath, refusing to be swayed out of his anger just because Daniel was tall and handsome and with broad shoulders. Asshole.

Blake grumbled, trudging down the hall with clenched fists. "Why does everybody care about these stupid insignificant things? We're risking magic and life for this thing." He walked right behind Daniel and tapped his shoulder. "Daniel. Hey, Daniel."

Daniel didn't even grace Blake with a glance. Instead, Daniel raised a finger at him, "One moment."

Blake's mouth dropped as his face caught on fire. He couldn't believe it. He had never been angrier in his entire life. Feeling steam pour out of his ears, Blake stomped back into the sitting room, nearly running Frances over. He grabbed the nearest seat cushion and Frances had to jump out of his way again. The lights in the hall flickered as Blake walked back to the wall that was Daniel's back. With all his frustration and his anger and everything he had been pent up, Blake walloped Daniel in the back of the head with the pillow. Twice.

"DANNY!"

#

DANIEL

Something contacted the back of Daniel's head. It didn't hurt. It wasn't even painful or even that strong, like a snowflake landing on the tip of his nose. The surprise of it made Daniel jump and lurched forward. He dropped his phone, which hit the window and smacked into the floor.

"What the hell-" Daniel said as he snapped his head around.

His mouth dropped.

Standing there and dropping a pillow to the floor was someone Daniel both recognized and didn't recognize at all. The eyes were the same, the light violet eyes every member of the Winslow family adorned. His were large and droopy, framed by thick eyelashes and gray bags. This person, this man was cut from marble, dusted by the fresh powdery snow outside. He had perfect dark curls and thick brows to match.

If only all these elegant features weren't aimed at him like a sharpened knife.

This beautiful, angry person went red in the face as they lashed out at Daniel with enough venom to make Daniel mortal again. He shouted, "Danny, you're such an asshole! Everybody kept telling me that you were so mature now, that you've changed, but it's a load of crap!" He threw his arms out while Daniel looked over his face again and again and again. He even conferred with Frances, cowering by the door.

Was this Blake?

No way.

"You're still the same punk kid! Who shows up late to their own engagement announcement? Who doesn't even come to some dumb luncheon to meet their fiancé? I traveled across the world to move into this cold ass castle where I'm completely alone and you can't even show up on time? I can't be the only one who makes an effort."

Blake Winslow.

With a huff, Blake reached for his finger and twisted something off. He chucked it right at Daniel and nailed him square in the forehead. Daniel whirled back with a curse.

Blake snapped. "Do the press conference yourself. I'm out of here."

"Wait-" Daniel begged as Blake turned from him. He felt like he was having an out of body experience. He suddenly remembered the last time he saw Blake Winslow. He had just told Link that he was the worst brother in the world and was storming off. He stayed in his room the rest of the trip. Some things didn't change, Daniel guessed.

Blake stopped and faced him again, making the bottom of Daniel's stomach fall out.

Oh. Maybe things did change.

"I'll marry you Daniel Bellerose," Blake stated. "I'll stay in Sagewick and I'll save our families, but I'm not going to let you push me around."

He took the last word again, snatching it right from underneath Daniel and it was like his body slammed into the ground.

He stormed right up to Frances, who seemed suddenly delighted by the attention. Frances stepped into the hallway and fixed his hair. "Hey," Blake said to him. "Do you know your way around here? Specifically, somewhere to get drunk?"

"Why yes," Frances smiled, and Daniel could see his fangs from here. Daniel crossed his arms and glared at Frances, trying to send death threats just by his eyes. Frances did notice the warnings. Frances loved every second of this and he just smiled wider, offering his hand. "I do. My name is Frances Petrovic, fellow prince of the night but not engaged to you."

"Perfect." Blake smiled back. He walked towards the staircase with Frances' hand on the small of his back, leading him there. Frances turned long enough to flip Daniel the middle finger, which Daniel returned with his own. That asshole.

Daniel felt like he just got ran over by an eighteen-wheeler.

He glanced down, where a glint caught his eye. Bending down, Daniel plucked a ring he recognized from the floor. His family's engagement ring. After several generations of Bellerose men and women exchanging this ring out of love and partnership, Daniel's fiancé chucks it at his head. And he deserved it. What was he thinking?

Blake was angry, of course, but underneath that, Daniel could see the fear and the hurt. All alone in this cold castle. Daniel cursed. He didn't know what to do or how to make it all up to Blake. He had never been in this type of situation before.

"There you are!" Michael shouted as he appeared from the sitting room. He raised his hands to the ceiling. "Where's Blake? What happened to Frances? What's going on?" He didn't wait for the answer to any of these questions. He just walked right up to Daniel, grabbed him and dragged him to the press conference. The engagement ring stayed clutched in his hands the entire time.

Blake Winslow.

#

Author's Note

I'm back baby! I've missed you guys and I've definitely missed writing this story~ And we've finally got to see from Daniel again! And they've met! AH! It was so much fun to write, you guys have no idea.

8. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

The press conference flew by and of course, the only question anyone wanted answered was "Who is Blake Winslow?" and "Where did he go?"

All Daniel could offer were promises and fancy talk of a future, more in-depth introduction to his shiny new fiancé. No one seemed totally placated by his responses, but lately it seemed like Daniel couldn't make anyone happy. He'd have to do more, to do something to satisfy their curiosities.

The moment his feet hit the outside hallway, safely away from the eyes of the press, Daniel released a loud suffering groan. He covered his face with his hands, manually attempting to rub the exhaustion out of his eyes.

It didn't work.

"I can't believe you drove Blake Winslow, the kindest boy in the world out of our home..." Daniel's mother berated him the moment she stepped inside the sitting room. She shoved her finger into his back as hard as she could, which for a normal vampire would be hard, but from a sick vampire like his mother, he was only slightly shoved. Just a smidge.

Daniel didn't want to look around.

He didn't want to see the look in her eyes. He feared it.

She went on lecturing, reducing Daniel to a child in front of his staff and his father, the king. That usual soft accent turned sharp quick. "After everything that boy has been through, you couldn't even show a *sliver*, darling, a *sliver* of kindness. I don't know if I've ever felt this disappointed in you. Honestly," she said, but stopped, suddenly needing to catch her breath. "This is worse than the time

you took your grandmother's ring and dropped it into the ocean."

That was one time when he was twelve, when he wanted to give it to a girl he really liked at school. He got nervous and had fiddled with his oven the bow of a boat. Needless to say, he dropped it. By accident. That night, he considered running away from home or joining some sort of vampiric protection agency.

"Mother..." Daniel turned, and the next word lodged in the middle of his throat. He choked on it, meeting that horrible saddened look in her eyes. Daniel did this. Only fools made their mothers this sad.

She sharply raised a finger in-between Daniel's eyes, their eyes. They had the same eyes. Those eyes narrowed, sucking all the light out of the room and blinding Daniel in a single spot light. "Fix this."

"Yes," Daniel bowed slightly, thoroughly chastised. "Your majesty."

She turned in her flurry, swinging her dress out and whipping her hair so Daniel was left with nothing, but a chilling breeze. His father patted his shoulder in sympathy as Daniel kept his head down. They left in a group.

Michael stood by his side, stabbing his finger into his phone with enough vigor to break the screen. "Frances is dead meat. I cannot believe that bastard flew across the sea just to be a God damn menace. Sir..." he said to Daniel with enough conviction that could probably take this whole coven over. "If you still want a friend tomorrow morning, you better hope I don't find him first. What an embarrassment to the coven..." He muttered the last part. Maybe Daniel wasn't even supposed to hear that, but he did and the sentiment wrenched his stomach.

Before Daniel could stop him, Michael stormed out of the lounge.

For that brief second, when the door swung closed behind him, Daniel let out a breath and felt like he was alone, like he had a moment to genuinely think. He made a mistake by being so consumed with himself and his own feelings that he forgot to spare Blake a thought.

He didn't truly understand what Blake was going through. If he told his mother that, she'd tell him to simply ask. Quickly, he gathered his winter coat and a black muffler. His mind whirred, over-heating as he tried to come up with all the places Frances, the prince of all bachelors, would take Daniel's irate and shockingly attractive fiancé. He couldn't imagine Blake Winslow at a club. Or a bar. Just imagining it felt irresponsible.

But Frances didn't know any other places.

Not one foot out the castle doors and someone snatched Daniel's arm, nearly ripping it right out of the socket. All the hair on Daniel's body stood as his instincts overwhelmed his senses. He grabbed this other person, trying to wrench free, but there was a surprising amount of resistance. Daniel whipped around to find Adrian.

Adrian. Something.

He didn't know Adrian's last name or much about Clay Winslow's assistant/bodyguard. The fact that this "man" looked entirely the same after all those years ago was too much of a striking detail for Daniel to miss. The surprise took him off guard. Right now, so close to this man forced Daniel to question everything about Adrian. Maybe he wasn't a wizard like he previously thought.

The scowl narrowing Adrian's brow was the same, but the disapproval was new. From Daniel's memory, Adrian seemed to only like Blake and his parents.

"Prince Daniel" Adrian said with a smile that didn't reach his eyes, "forgive me for the impertinence but..." He squeezed Daniel's arm once before letting go. "You and I must speak."

"Right. Adrian, it's good to see you, but I'm in a bit of a rush. I'm off to find Blake now—" Daniel tried to walk down the steps when Adrian grabbed him again, pulling him back up. "What are you-?"

"Sir, do you know why I came here?" He asked Daniel and Daniel stared back, thinking this must be a trick question. Daniel felt like he had been dropped in another timeline, one in which he didn't

have all the answers and he was suddenly the least prepared guy in the room. Surely by the end of the day, he was going to be the first vampire to suffer an aneurism.

"You came with Blake," Daniel guessed, sounding like a total idiot.

"Exactly. Watching out for Blake is my job. He's *the* job..." He tilted his head, meeting Daniel's eyes as he tried to get through to his thick vampiric skull. "But once I'm gone, I will pass this important job off to you, so I'd like to leave Sagewick with confidence, knowing you will protect him. In this moment, I wouldn't be able to bring myself to leave."

Daniel rolled back his shoulders.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now, go find him. Don't let me keep you."

Daniel nodded, feeling like a little boy being sent back to the store with a stolen candy bar to apologize. The shame was so heavy, Daniel couldn't lift his head, not until Adrian raised his voice, remembering something, "Oh! Sir, one more thing..."

Daniel looked up from the bottom of the stairs.

"If anything happens to him, I will destroy you and I know without you, the curse would not be lifted, but I don't care about your family. My loyalty lies with that boy and his family, who will survive either way."

Their eyes stayed locked on each other. Adrian didn't waver. His cold eyes didn't blink. He simply smiled and turned in one easy turn, slipping back inside the house. The door clicked and the hold on Daniel's body suddenly released and all his tension relaxed, but a pounding ache remained as if he was just beaten with a bag full of rocks.

That didn't feel natural. Somehow, it was like Adrian wrapped his hand around Daniel's heart and held him in place until he was done

with him. To Daniel, it reminded him of charming someone with his own magic...

Sucking in a breath, Daniel's eyes widened, snapping at the door. He figured it out. Why didn't anyone ever tell him? And why didn't he ever notice that Adrian was a vampire?

#

BLAKE

The small crowd of Blake's new best friend cheered before they took their shots of tequila. The liquor rattled Blake's bones and he gagged, quickly sucking on his lime to soothe that awful taste. He still shuddered, which made of his new friends, Ethan laughed and pat his back.

"Feels good doesn't it?" Ethan asked in his gorgeous Sagewick accent. He rested his arm around Blake's shoulder and with his free hand, he played with one of Blake's many dark curls. "Are you ready for another?"

"I'm never ready for anything," Blake admitted. His filter already left the building an hour ago, the moment they arrived at Josephine's club, The Verona. He glanced at Frances, using his big droopy eyes to plead for permission.

Frances lost his tie along the way and unbuttoned his shirt. He basically dripped off the bar stool, a man with bones made from fine silks and eyes of velvet. There was something so naturally charming about Frances that made Blake's heart flutter.

His mouth, however, didn't match his elegant appearance. With a snort, Frances gave a little shrug. "I'm not your babysitter, Blake. You're an adult. If you want another shot. Take another shot. Dance on the tables. Who cares?" He saluted the wizard with his small dark liquid, before taking a sip for himself.

A thrill enraptured Blake and he was beaming, looking back at Ethan, who he just met, but made Blake feel like the best-looking guy at the party. This was it. This was the college experience he

dreamed to have with a night full of friends, bad decisions and all the tequila he could possibly guzzle.

"I'll have that shot," Blake confidently told Ethan, his cheeks aching from all the smiling. Thoughts of the curse and the impending wedding fizzled from his mind. All that existed was him and this sex on a stick.

Ethan laughed and waved the bartender back over, who was just as beautiful as everyone else in this city. She had warm brown skin, voluptuous curves and the smile of a friend. She had the power to bring Blake lots of delicious and yet, horrible drinks. He needed the warmth, the molten golden liquid that spilled down his throat and warmed even the tips of his toes. He was so sick of being cold.

"Two more," Ethan said, dropping his hand on Blake's thigh, giving it a small squeeze. A hot sensation went straight to Blake's groin and he was so thankful Ethan didn't attempt to move his hand.

Ethan had large hands and smelled a little like spicy cologne. Unlike all the guys at his college, Ethan looked like a grown-up in his tight shirt and with his silver watch that was covered in diamonds. His chiseled jaw was covered in a soft beard, the same chestnut color of his tussled hair.

Blake decided immediately, *I am putting my mouth on this guy's mouth.*

The Verona had more people than Blake knew in real life. They packed the dance floor, while groups of friends sat snuggly inside booths and private areas, gated off by velvet ropes. A gigantic chandelier hung from the very middle of the high ceiling, that sparkled against the red and blue, changing lights. A DJ stood at a stage, high off the ground, pouring music into all the remaining space, what bodies and smoke didn't already take up.

Together, Blake and Ethan took their shots.

Only shuddering a little Blake said, "Wow. That was much easier than the first one. Hey!" He grabbed onto Ethan's shoulder as he swayed, enjoying the feel of his strong muscle in his hands. He

unconsciously squeezed again. "If I have another is it gonna be like drinking water? Should I be drinking water?"

"I guess so..." Ethan laughed again, this huge smile with all white teeth. He shook his head, subtly moving a little closer, making Blake's head spin with his smell. "You are entirely too adorable. I'm at a loss." Leaning that much closer, his hand slid up Blake's thigh, giving him that same warm fidgety feeling. "What say you and I go to the next bar? Leave your friend here and we can really get to know each other. I'll even tell you my last name."

"Oh, what a great line."

Ethan laughed, but a pale hand cut between Blake and Ethan, slapping over Blake's mouth. Lording over him, Frances pulled Blake back, pressing him into his chest as he explained, "Sorry. I'm not your babysitter, but I am still your fiancé's friend."

Ethan's brow narrowed at Blake. "You have a fiancé?"

Pulling at Frances' frozen hand, Blake managed to get out between the boney fingers, "Kind of."

"Too bad, so sad," France pouted, waving Ethan away. "It's been fun, but begone human." He pulled a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket and tossed it at Ethan's lap. "For the shots and your half chub. Now, beat it before I eat you."

With a huff, Ethan shoved the money in his pocket and stormed away. He grumbled and cursed both Frances and Blake as he slipped through the crowd. Like that, Ethan was gone. Blake slumped low as Frances let him go. Frances hopped up on Ethan's old bar stool, examining the remaining shot glasses and using his finger to dig up the salt from the rims and lick it off. "If you wanna make-out in the bathroom that's cool, but like don't leave my sight."

"Usually people wait until marriage to have sex because they want to," Blake started talking. It was supposed to be an inside thought, but once he opened his mouth, he couldn't get it to close. "But I'm gonna marry Danny as a virgin just because there's always some other guy cock blocking me. I've really, really tried to have sex my

whole life..."

"Two more shots," Frances grinned at the bar tender. "Sorry, please go on."

"All I've ever wanted in life is for someone to love me and then have tons of hot steamy sex times with me—thank you," he told the bartender as he took the next shot, which in fact, went down his throat so much easier. That last shot hit Blake like a slap to the face, knocking his whole world sideways. "Now, my first and my only for the rest of my life is going to be that freaking Danny stupid face Bellerose who can't even show up to breakfast on time. Where does he get off just acting all high and mighty? As if his time is more important than mine."

"Trust me, from what I know about Daniel," Frances said and nudged the other shot towards Blake. "This is yours. I don't drink tequila. From what I know, the Prince of Sagewick doesn't get off at all. You two have one thing in common, good for you."

"I don't wanna talk anymore," Blake grumbled, furrowing his brow, thinking this might be the only way to keep his brains from crushing his skull and spilling out of his forehead. He slid off the stool. "I'm going to dance."

His legs criss-crossed and he stumbled right into a pair of guys. "Hey, slow down," one of the men said. "The night is still young."

"Babe don't leave without me," Frances cooed, emerging from behind as he draped his arm around Blake's shoulders. Blake looked up, catching the flash of red in Frances' usual hazel eyes. They shimmered like rubies catching the light and the other two men bowed their heads and continued their way through the crowds. "Seriously, Blake, don't walk away from me."

"Wh-what do you mean? Is it not safe here?"

"Sagewick is a safe place, but if you run into a wild animal, you'd still stay cautious? Wouldn't you? It's nighttime in a city full of vampires, little wizard and your blood fizzes like champagne."

"I feel like I need another shot."

With that, Frances unleashed a brutish laugh, but slipped his fingers through Blake's and dragged him to the dance floor. He gave Blake a few spins, which brought out his brightest smile and his dorkiest laugh. Frances showed off some smooth moves too as they danced. The songs went by and Blake's mind floated into the clouds, while his body doubled in weight. He could've stayed on that dance floor forever with Frances, but Frances wasn't his fiancé. Frances wasn't even his friend.

After a few songs, a beautiful blonde stole Frances' eyes. He tipped an invisible hat towards Blake before gyrating his way towards the blonde. Blake sighed, before shouting at Frances, "I'm going to get a drink of water!"

"Good plan!" Frances held a thumbs up.

Blake rolled his eyes. He squeezed through the crowds, back to the stairs, where he didn't quite reach the top, noticing the huge crowd formed around the bar. Relaxing against the railing, Blake closed his eyes and took several deep breaths that didn't clear a single cloud of fog clogging inside his head. It felt like being stuffed with itchy cotton or like stuck inside a stuffy house in the summer.

He mumbled, "I'm going outside."

Holding onto the railing and then, the walls Blake found his way outside of the club.

#

Author's Note

I hope you enjoyed the chapter!! What did you think about Adrian being a vampire?? And what about his threat to Danny? Also, what do you think about Drunk Blake? Who would win in a fight? Sober Blake vs. Drunk Blake? Lol.

As always, don't forget to leave a comment below. All thoughts and comments are appreciated!! And if you like my writing, check out my other books!

9. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

Finding Frances sandwiched between a blonde vampire guy and a muscular werewolf woman was not the strangest place Daniel had ever found his friend. In college, he once found Frances sitting in a punch bowl, wearing his grandmother's wedding dress and singing the Canadian national anthem.

Daniel yanked him back to his feet before the orgy started. "Where's Blake?"

"Whoa! Hey, Danny," Frances grinned, and the smell the blood mixed with liquor wafted from his mouth and invaded Daniel's nostrils. At least it wasn't a smell of someone he recognized. "You should've seen your face, Danny when Blake whacked you with that pillow! Your tongue slapped the floor, Danny!"

"I'm gonna kill you," Daniel promised. "Where's Blake? If I have to ask you again-"

Frances' eyes flashed red. "What? Are you going to punish me?"

Daniel grimaced. "You're trashed."

"And you're not my Dad." Frances reached back for his drink, taking another swig. The only way to inebriate a vampire was to let them drink the blood of someone intoxicated, so whoever was trashed, their blood stained Frances' lips.

"Frances. I'm not kidding around, and I'm not asking again."

"Fine," Frances rolled his eyes and waved Daniel away, suddenly tired of the conversation. "I think he went back up to the bar for some water or something." He strolled back to his new friends, draping his lanky arms around them. At least someone was having a good time and they all looked more than pleased to see him.

Now, Daniel stood alone in the crowd.

Daniel loathed places like this.

Too many people he didn't know. Too much unwanted noise. How were people even supposed to talk to each other at places like this? He couldn't figure out why those two chose this club of all places. At least it wasn't the tackiest club he had ever seen. He trudged up the stairs, searching the crowd for Blake's face. He'd never forget a face like that.

Daniel never thought he had a type.

But his type might be droopy eyed guys with curly hair.

"Blake?" Daniel called out. He took a turn around the bar, once and then twice. His chest tightened tighter and tighter as the seconds crept by. He muscled his way through the swarm of people around the bar. "Hey!" He called the bartender. "I'm looking for a guy."

"Aren't we all?" The girl beside him raised her shot and then, like magic, made it disappear.

"No, he's my fiancé. New to town with curly hair and a gray suit."

"I'm sorry," the bartender shook her head. "I see a lot of people."

Daniel cursed under his breath, pushing off the counter. He hurried back to the stairwell, looking down at the huge dance floor and the levels of booths and secret corners he couldn't even see from there. With all these people, Daniel didn't even know where to start.

#

BLAKE

The cold was nice. Nicer than inside the stuffy club.

He took a deep breath, but it wasn't enough to calm the furnace blazing inside his chest. His feet moved down the street on their own, but it got harder to walk the heavier his head grew. Blake collapsed onto the nearest park bench to get his bearing, to keep

the street from tipping completely sideways. He glanced up, fighting the fuzzy feeling in his head as he admired the decorations flooding the city.

Garland wrapped each and every lamppost with a huge red bow tied to the top. A star adorned their tops like Christmas trees. The buildings themselves were connected by nets of thousands of twinkling lights as if they were suspended in the air by magic. Ornaments hung from the naked pointy trees. Every storefront wore their own Christmas decorations. Blake missed decorating his parent's tree this year...

Slowly, little flecks of snow drifted from the vast inky black sky. The snowflakes fluttered down, dusting the street with pretty white powder like the top of French toast. Blake chuckled to himself. "Wow, you're really trying to make me love you, Sagewick, huh?" The little flakes laid across his hair and his cheeks. It felt like an honor.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Someone said as they dropped in the seat beside Blake. Blake's heavy head dropped a little, forcing him to catch himself. Blake hoped it was Frances. He wished it was Daniel. Someone at least had to chase after him. He was worth that much.

But when he turned, there was a strange man there with a gaunt face and large hollow eyes. A bit of the tequila dribbled back up Blake's throat while his stomach plummeted to his feet. He fidgeted, trying to find his voice, but he came across as meek as a drunken mouse. "Y-yeah, you guys really go all out."

"So, you're visiting, huh?" The man asked, scooting closer and Blake pressed his body against the bench railing. It wasn't far enough. Closer, Blake could see the stains on his clothes, but his eyes focused on the brown stains around the collar of his shirt. "Where are you from?"

"Um," Blake took a deep breath, but it didn't feel like enough. "Yes. I just stepped out of the Verona—"

"All alone?" The man interjected

"No, my friends should be meeting me out here any second. Actually, I'll go meet up with them now." Blake shot to his feet. "All my friends, my tons and tons of friends are probably worried about me—"

He only managed one step forward, when the man snatched his wrist and yanked him back down. The back of Blake's head slammed the park bench, making all the twinkling lights above him waver and double. He tried to call for help, but the man's cold hand covered his mouth, clutching his cheek. It felt bruising and Blake couldn't breathe.

He whimpered, grabbing the man's wrist. He pulled and pushed at his chest, but it was like fighting a stone pillar. The man's eyes flashed a deep blood red, his excitement bubbling over. He even started to drool. "Don't be in such a rush. It's so rare a wizard comes to visit. It's been so long since I tasted a wizard, you wouldn't mind, would you? All that blood," he came across like a desperate, dying man. "All that blood to spare. Just a little, please? Just to quench my thirst."

Blake tried begging for him to stop, but all his pleas were muffled and drowned out. His tears leaked from his eyes, spilling down the side of his face. The strength of this man didn't even allow Blake to struggle, no matter how hard he thrashed. It was heartbreaking. The man opened his mouth as his fangs lengthened. He slobbered on his own hand. Blake shut his eyes, bracing for the pain. This close, the man smelled of copper, smelled like this wasn't his first meal tonight.

"Get off him!" A voice roared and the weight on top of Blake disappeared. Blake cried out, sobbing out of relief. He unconsciously held his arms over his face to protect himself. It couldn't be over, just like that. His breathing labored as he peeked around to find Daniel hurling Blake's attacker to the ground. Running up from the street, Frances held his arms out in shock.

Daniel grabbed the man's collar and in the same sweeping motion, Daniel punched him across the face and the man's body went totally limp. He tossed him back down. Daniel's ruby eyes didn't fade away.

Instead, they snapped at Frances, "What the hell? Where were you?"

"I thought he'd be fine!" Frances insisted.

Blake struggled to sit up, his body still trembling. He was even too afraid to check to see if that man was unconscious. Turning onto his side, Blake pressed his forehead to the bench and wept. He wished the world would stop spinning. He wished he'd stop shaking.

"Yeah, you thought he'd be fine? No. You thought you could get lucky. When are you ever going to think about someone other than yourself?" Daniel shouted and for the first time since Blake knew him, Frances didn't say anything back. He shut his mouth completely. Daniel shook his head. "Stay here with this asshole until the cops come..."

Blake could hear his footsteps as Daniel approached. "Blake?" His voice softened as he kept his distance. "I'm coming over there, okay?"

Quickly, Blake wiped his face. He tried lifting himself up, but no part of his body was listening to him. He swayed and Daniel was there in time to grab his arm. He pulled Blake up into strong arms, sweeping him off the freezing bench. "I've got you. I've got you."

Nodding, Blake couldn't open his eyes. He just turned into Daniel's chest and held tight onto his coat. He never thought he'd be so happy to see Daniel again and so quickly. "Are you alright?" He asked.

Blake blurry eyed looked up at him to see if he was serious.

"Got it," Daniel nodded. "We're leaving..." He walked back to Frances and they locked eyes. He took a breath before admitting, "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," Frances mumbled. "Sorry, Blake."

"I can't believe you apologized to Frances before me," Blake said. Apparently, his filter turned completely off for the rest of the night. "Asshole."

"Yeah, we're leaving," Daniel muttered and started walking towards the car. Blurry-eyed, Blake looked up at Daniel's scowl, the snow falling from the sky and Christmas lights. He couldn't believe it, in that moment, that this was his life.

#

Author's Note

Hello friends! I'm back from two weeks of being sick. Just cool people things. It's been tough getting back into writing after getting sick and all the Holiday Madness. To my fellow retail employees, I feel you.

But we're back! And it's good to be back! Of course things got a little harry. Never separate from the group! But Daniel swooped in just in time ~ Do you think this is enough to earn Blake's forgiveness? Or do we wanna see more grovelling? Lol.

10. Daniel

DANIEL

Daniel's mission was to make sure Blake didn't hate him even more than he already must. Because of course he did. This was an arduous task because all he wanted to do was wring Blake's neck for getting drunk. He wanted to scream at him over leaving the club alone, but Daniel kept his mouth shut.

But no one was talking in that car.

Not even Blake, who so far, had a lot to say. Maybe he was too busy trying not to vomit all over Daniel's car. See? Daniel kept that comment to himself. After a few beats of silence, Daniel couldn't think of one way to start a conversation with Blake, which was as frustrating as an itch that he couldn't reach to scratch. The fact that someone hated him, someone found him unhelpful drove Daniel crazy. What was worse, that person was right here.

"See," he started, trying to find some form of humor to lighten the situation. "I usually make it on time."

"Don't try to be cute," Blake said, which wasn't what Daniel was going for at all, but kind of liked the accidental side effect. It was a good thing Blake was curled up against the door, slowly slipping into unconsciousness so he couldn't see him flushing. "You don't get a free pass because you did all that. I'm still mad at you."

"All that?" Daniel laughed, baffled by the lack of appreciation. "You mean saving your ass? What were you even doing at that sleezy club anyways?"

So much for not fighting.

"Sleezy?" Blake pulled himself up, unable to unfurrow his brow. "We didn't go to just some random bar. That was Josephine's club!"

"Josephine?"

"Your cousin-"

"I know who Josephine is! I just..."

Daniel didn't know she owned a club. He didn't know Michael was married or mated or whatever werewolves call it nowadays. The people who were around him the most were giving him the biggest surprises today. He shook his head, turning onto the mountain that would lead home. "Whatever. It doesn't matter. Is that it, then? You've just decided you're never going to forgive me? You're just going to hate me forever?"

"No, of course not."

"Because you were right. We're in this together and I think, we should at least be friends."

Blake rolled his eyes. "Do you even know how to have friends?" Before Daniel could counter, Blake raised his finger, "Frances doesn't count and neither do my brothers. You only seem them a few times a year."

Daniel opened his mouth again, but Blake jumped in, "Family doesn't count either."

"Piss off, Blake. I remember how the Winslow family works. You all stick together so I doubt you're raking it in the friend department."

Only silence followed.

"I know this is going to sound idiotic..." Daniel rolled his eyes at himself. Even thinking it felt ridiculous. "But I froze when my parents told me about the curse. Everything about my life just shattered in front of me. This isn't how I planned for any of this to go. I planned to take the coven over, then, fall in love and do the marriage thing. Not the other way around."

"I guess it goes to show you can't plan your life like that. We both learned that the hard way."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he chuckled, miserably. "I was going to start at a new college where no one knew my name and I wanted to see new things and meet all kinds of people. Honestly... I planned to see the whole world, but now I just don't know if I will. So, I don't think you're dumb for thinking that."

This time, when they went quiet, it wasn't the awkward silence of not knowing what to say. Nothing needed to be said because they both understood each other perfectly. Daniel drove through the palace gates, driving off to the side where they stored the garage. He explained, "If you ever need a backway inside, this is good too."

"Hmm," Blake hummed and stumbled out of the car. He slipped, nearly sliding right onto his ass, but he caught himself between Josephine's red Porsche and Daniel's side mirror. "I'm fine! I'm good!" He dusted himself off and trotted into the castle.

"You're a menace," Daniel muttered, staying close behind. Just incase the ceiling decided to collapse and crush Blake into a pancake. Even if a power greater than himself put a single scrape on Blake's porcelain skin, Daniel would surely be blamed. He stepped towards the main entrance, where he assumed Blake would go, but Blake wandered into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" Daniel whispered, aware of the staff that still might be lurking the halls. Being intoxicated wasn't putting Blake in mortal harm, but he doubted anyone would approve. "You won't find your bedroom in a cupboard."

"Hilarious," Blake said with a little smirk, which confused Daniel because he seemed to mean it. "You're out of your mind if you think my night out is finished. I'm going to have fun tonight. No matter what!" With that, Blake pulled a drawer too hard and all the silverware inside clattered and scrapped against each other.

"Sshh," Daniel hissed. "You'll wake the entire castle."

Still grinning, Blake wobbly turned and rested against the marble countertop. He tilted his head and his black curls fell across his

forehead. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes that worried Daniel greatly. "Wanna be my friend, Danny?"

The way Blake said his name changed the way it sounded. Danny sounded boyish and silly out of everyone else's mouth. Something about the way Blake said Danny was sweet, like fingers caressing a cheek or the pull of a smile. He said Danny as if no other Danny in the world existed.

"Yes...?" Daniel answered, but crossed his arms. He didn't trust this for a second.

"Then tell me where the booze is!"

Daniel hushed him again. He walked over and grabbed Blake's arm, giving it a tug. "Come on, you idiot. We keep some in the study, this way."

Against his better judgement, Daniel led Blake to one of the less used studies in the castle. This was where the books less used were sent to collect dust. It was the only place Daniel could go and be absolutely sure no one would be around to bother him. During parties, this was where the staff would catch the guests coming to make-out. Blake's brother Link had been caught here a couple of times. Blake too. Only when he was a kid and he'd run away to cry over something.

Blake walked straight to the liquor cabinet and plopped to the ground, so he could rummage through the shelves of dusty bottle on the bottom. He hummed, searching for whatever was just right. "To truly cement our friendship," Blake grunted, until he found his prize. "Ah! Ha!" He twisted around, hoisting an ancient bottle of vodka into the air. "Let's get drunk, for old time's sake." He shook the bottle as if to entice Daniel.

Daniel snorted, setting his hands in pockets. "That won't get me drunk, Blake. I'm a vampire. There's only..." he tilted his head, watching Blake take a huge swig of the vodka, enough to make him shudder and gag. He still went for another. Daniel just blinked and shook his head. Blake was like another species. "There's only one way to get a vampire drunk."

"I'm listening." Blake grinned, swaying a little and making Daniel's chest tighten. This guy had no idea just how sexy he looked, sprawled on the floor at Daniel's feet and inviting him so nicely. This all felt like nothing but trouble.

"I'm a vampire. I drink blood. To get drunk, I have to feed from someone who's intoxicated—"

Not one second later, Blake scoffed and threw out his arm towards me. "Oh! Well, here yah go!" He slapped the inside of his arm, like he was getting ready for an IV. "Let's do this, Bellerose."

"Absolutely not," Daniel stated. "I'm not biting you."

"Why not? Who cares?" Blake sputtered, attempting to brush it off. "Get drunk with me. I don't want to be the only drunk guy."

Daniel shook his head.

"Let's make a deal." Blake raised his leg, pressing his foot against Daniel's thigh. Everything inside of Daniel fought not to snatch his ankle. "Get drunk with me and I'll totally forgive. I'll never bring up your lateness again."

"Don't bring it up and we need to go on a date, somewhere where the press can take loads of pictures."

"Deal."

Like that, Blake jumped to his feet and Daniel held his arms out to keep him steady. "You're a mess," he said, but with a small smile.

Blake just threw off his jacket. "I don't wanna brag, but apparently my blood fizzes."

Taking a deep breath, Daniel decided to give up. He reached for the bottom of Blake's sleeves, undoing the button on his cuff. While holding onto Blake's hand, Daniel used his free hand to roll up his sleeve. He didn't move his hand at first, caught by Blake's lilac eyes. Just under his thumb, he could feel Blake's heart thrumming. It was a nice comforting sound that he could fall asleep to.

Right here. Right now. Daniel didn't feel like a Prince. He just felt like Danny, not that he ever really knew who that was, but right here. Right now. He felt like he was beginning to get an idea.

#

Author's Note

Hello friends! I've had a pretty stormy past couple of months, but the sky is clear and I can finally return :)) I'm so happy to be back. I've missed you guys!!

Let me know what you guys think of the chapter! I love to know your reactions~ I mean, is this a bad idea? Or a good idea? Are you warming up to Daniel? Do you think Blake should ever drink again? Lol.

And if you like this book, check out my other novels. For a more angsty book with a lot of passion, check out Going Rogue. For a mystery between childhood friends turned lovers (maybe), check out Somewhere. And for more of a romantic comedy, check out The Golden Rule (which is also the book where Frances FIRST gets introduced ~ It's a baby Frances)

11. Blake

BLAKE

Blake sucked in a cool breath that spilled like ice water down his throat to fill his chest. Time changed as Daniel stood in Blake's space. It slowed to a crawl. The air stirred around Blake, changing the tilt of the earth, but that could always be the copious amounts of booze. Everything still felt a little fuzzy and dreamy as they stood in the warm library.

His heart thrummed as if it could wave its hands and try to warn Blake that Daniel was coming for him as if he wasn't already painfully aware how close Daniel Bellerose stood to him. His endlessly dark eyes bore right through Blake's skull. Like this, it felt like he could read Blake's mind as if he could hear Blake's thought run wild about the shape of his mouth and the cut of his face and the burning look in those eyes. This look gave Blake chills.

He can safely say Daniel never looked at him like this before.

A strange new feeling emerged inside of Blake, one he didn't know how to hold, so he lost it. Maybe with more practice, he'd know what to do with it next time. Tonight, he laughed nervously and made a small request. "Just be gentle with me, Danny."

"I'm insulted you even have to ask," Daniel smirked, leaning just a little closer. If Blake just stretched a tad higher on his toes, they'd kiss. The space between them would vanish and it'd just be lips gently pressed against lips. Blake couldn't escape the pull of that heated look. Daniel sighed, growing a little more serious. "It won't hurt. I already promise not to hurt you again."

"Let's see if you're a liar," Blake whispered and for courage, took another drink of whatever this liquor was. Whatever it was went

down his throat like burning hot coals.

"Just close your eyes and relax," Daniel said and then, muttered something Blake probably wasn't supposed to hear. "Can't believe you talked me into this..."

At first, Blake closed his eyes like he was told, but he couldn't help himself. He peeked just as Daniel's fangs extended, before they disappeared inside Blake's skin. Daniel was only a liar for a split second, a horrible needle like pain piercing through his entire arm. That pain melted suddenly, replaced by a warm sensation like liquid sunshine that spread to the tips of his fingers and to the bottom of his toes. His knees melted, turning all warm and gooey.

Daniel reached out, sliding his arm around Blake's back to keep him steady, but Daniel stumbled. He stopped drinking suddenly, his body trembling as a snort jumped past his lips. He slipped his mouth back over the wound, messily drinking. Some of Blake's blood leaked from the side of his mouth as he tried desperately to hold in his laughter.

Blake chuckled, his smile unwavering as his delight fluttered like wild hummingbirds inside his chest. With his free hand, he found the courage to reach out and caress the back of Daniel's head. His fingers dipped lower, just past his collar. Daniel shivered between Blake's hands and that ignited another flash of chaotic laughter as wild as the first spark of a forest fire. He started laughing so hard, he had to use Blake to stand up as he pressed his head against Blake's chest. Blake laughed, continuing to stroke the back of Daniel's head to make sure no screws had gotten loose.

"Oh, shit—I mean, shoot," Daniel blurted, quickly licking up the blood dripping from Blake's arm. It was too late for Blake's shirt as a crimson stain bloomed up the white cotton. Somehow, this was the funniest thing in the world to him.

"Wow, that was quick." It made Blake smile so hard, his cheeks hurt. He gripped Daniel's shoulders, pulling back to admire the hazy look in his eyes and his veil of amusement. "That was quick. You don't drink very often, do you? I mean, drink to get drunk. You seem like a lightweight."

"Shut up," Daniel muttered and licked up the bite wound, causing Blake to shiver. It was enough to keep the wound from bleeding anymore. "You're just really drunk."

"*You're* drunk!"

"Because of *you*!" Daniel released him, but Blake grabbed his arm. He pulled Daniel into the middle of the spacious study, among the worn leather and the huge unraveling ornate rug. Letting go, Blake hurried to the farthest wall where an old radio was busy collecting dust.

He fiddled with it, shouting loud enough for Daniel to hear, "Okay! Okay! So, this date thing...." Flipping random switches eventually awakened the little machine and suddenly, light and music poured from the speakers. "Yes! Okay, what should we do?"

The music crackled as it desperately searched for a signal underneath all the stonework of the castle and from the top of a snowy mountain in the woods. Daniel squinted, shedding his jacket and blazer. "I don't know. I haven't been on a date since college."

"What? Am I supposed to plan it?" Blake scrunched his brow, stumbling back towards the coffee table. He took one last swig of whatever that demonic little bottle held. It burned the way down and melted the rest of braincells into a mushy puddle at the bottom of his skull. "I mean, I've never planned a date before."

"Really? Um, well uh..." He cocked his head, annoyingly standing perfectly still. Blake danced towards him, grabbing his wrists and pulling him closer. "We could do something for the wedding?"

A lightbulb flashed over Blake's head. "Or Christmas? We could uh- go Christmas shopping for your mom!"

"Yeah, yeah." Daniel nodded and his little bobbing turned into dancing.

"Or!" Blake piped up. He shoved Daniel a little. "Ornament shopping for our first Christmas together!"

"Yes!" Daniel smiled nice and wide, blinding Blake. "You're a

genius," he said sweetly, pulling Blake in from around his waist.

He spun Blake around, but Blake didn't want him to feel left out. He grabbed both of Daniel's hands and started whirling around, until they were both dizzy and falling to the floor in a heap of laughter and breathless gasps. They met each other's eyes and for no reason at all, they were thrown into another fit of laughter. Slowly, their cackling died out and only a mellow rock song played. The rest of the castle sat still as if they were the only people in the entire world.

Blake rested on his back, admiring the ceiling and even the smallest details there. Every corner of this palace felt hand crafted with the upmost care. If he tried to find every special little design, it'd take his entire life to discover it all. And yet, it was still all so familiar. He could close his eyes and remember these rooms, how they all played as children and ran wild. Every winter, when the Winslow kids descended upon Sagewick, the children ran the palace.

Blake decided to ask, "When we were kids, why were you so mean to me?"

"I don't know..." Daniel admitted. He closed his eyes, unconsciously tapping the beat to the song with her hands crossed across his chest. For the first time since Blake saw him, the prince seemed perfectly at ease. "I mean," he shrugged. "You were the youngest. I wanted Link to like me, so I teased you. Plus..." He peeked around, opening one of his beautiful hazel eyes. "You were super annoying."

"Hey!" Blake gawked, shoving Daniel hard before he sat back up. He clumsily moved his curls out of his face with the heal of his palm. A part of him wished he didn't even ask. He kind of got the impression from the boys back then that he was the third wheel... but it still wasn't very nice to hear it confirmed.

"I'm sorry," Danny grunted, pushing himself up too. He reached into his pocket and took out the engagement ring. It seemed so much smaller in the palm of his wide hand. Still, the sapphire eye in the middle of the ring glared at Blake. "I'd warn you that I can be a bit of an ass, but you already know that." He motioned Blake, who understood. Blake lifted his hand, using his other to keep himself

from falling back to the floor. Daniel slipped the engagement ring across Blake's ring finger, but without letting go.

"It's a nice ring," Blake remarked, admiring the gem. "Really nice. Are you sure I should be wearing it? It's so fancy."

Daniel chuckled. "If you don't wear it, who's gonna wear it?"

"Why don't *you* wear it?"

"Me? No way, it's too fancy."

"Shut up!" What started off as a grin turned into laughter. Blake laughed so hard, he ended up falling onto his side. "You're so dumb." Daniel looked down at him with a soft sort of smile. Shaking his head, Blake held his engagement ring up, fanning his fingers out against the light of the chandelier. "It's still so weird. I feel like none of this is really happening. If I close my eyes, I'm back at college..."

"I know. One second our life is going as planned and then..." Daniel snapped his fingers and wobbled. "Poof! That's it. Our parents finally tell us the truth." He finally admitted defeat and laid flat on the floor.

"Yeah, we didn't have much of a choice. We're just doing what we're told. I mean, what gives?" Blake started talking, he went off and now, he couldn't stop the more he thought about it. "Our ancestors five hundred years ago just decide that we have to get married, that we're the ones that have to pay the debts *they* made? I mean, what gives?"

"Yeah," Daniel nodded. "Who gave them the right to decide our fates? We didn't get a say at all. We didn't talk to that demon. We weren't the ones that made a deal with it. They should've paid the price, not us."

"You're right." The idea struck Blake like lightening, illuminating the solution so plainly to him. Everything brightened in that split second and he snapped upright, dizzily forced to find his balance on the nearest armrest. Daniel laid his hand on Blake's back to assist. "We didn't speak to the demon, but we can."

"Excuse me?"

Blake jumped to his feet and hoisted Daniel back up, but without stopping. He gripped Daniel's hand tighter as he dragged the vampire out of the study. Blake rushed down the halls, his heart thrumming through every vein. The excitement was too much to contain. He was a genius. He couldn't believe he hadn't come up with this idea before now. "We can call the demon! It was uh, Craig or whatever. I don't remember, but I have the agreement!"

"You have it?" Daniel started to yell but threw his hand over his mouth. He eyed the doors around them and hurried to catch up with Blake's pace to speak closer to his ear. "You have it? Just with you? Just like that?"

"My mother gave it to me," Blake explained, running up the stairs to reach his room. "I think it was supposed to be symbolic or something, but I can use it to summon the demon."

"Can you do that? Summon it?" Daniel's said, really giving Blake the confidence boost he needed. "That sounds like intense magic."

"I think so. I mean, we're technically the holders of the deal. If we call this demon, it should answer. Besides! It's just a little summoning magic. I used to summon cats and dogs all the time if I got a little lonely at home."

Daniel winced. "Hm. Don't think that's the equivalent."

"Have a little faith," Blake scowled at him as he pushed through his guest bedroom door. His face warm as he remembered the horrible state of his room: the piles of clothes wrinkling by the second, the decorative pillows and bed sheets thrown in disarray. There was still his dinner tray from the previous night and a tray of snacks Adrian brought him to help him relax.

"How old are you again?" Daniel asked.

Blake chucked the nearest pillow at him. Daniel caught it without even looking and laughed. "I mean, are you going to be able to find the Deal in all this?" As he asked, he raised one of Blake's boxers

from the floor, his favorite pair that was covered in little polka dots. Blake snatched it out of his hands, his face totally scorched and maybe even scarred forever.

"Quit it! If you're not gonna help, stay out of my way."

Daniel raised his hands in surrender and Blake huffed, pocketing his underwear. Still, his skin itched as Daniel wandered around the corner of Blake's vision. He'd glanced through one suitcase, open a drawer and even pick through his clothes in the closet. "I don't understand your clothes. This is not an adult man's wardrobe."

"Danny, I swear to God..." Blake started to say when he found the envelope that held most of his important documents like his passport, the first picture his parents showed him of Danny and the original itinerary for his flight to the country.

"What on earth are you going to wear for our date? You have to be presentable to the press, you know? I don't even see your shoes. I need you to tell me you brought more shoes than the converses on your feet. Tell me before I have an aneurism, Blake Winslow."

"*Danny*," Blake stressed, lifting the scroll his mother gave him, the same scroll he tried to forget even existed. Daniel walked across the room, grabbing the bed frame, swinging around with it to look over Blake's shoulder as he unrolled the scroll.

At the bottom was the same blistering name:

Ignacio.

Blake dragged his hand down the old parchment and sparks jumped from his fingertips. "The magic is still surprisingly strong for being so old."

The light shimmered across Daniel's face, making his eyes sparkle. He grinned. "Just tell me what you need."

Blake mirrored the same mischievous grin, the excitement dancing through him. "Find me some chalk and as many candles as you can find."

Almost as soon as he left, Daniel returned with the chalk, a few worn out crumbling pieces and a laundry hamper full of candles.

"Forgot some matches—" Daniel started to say, but the words faded away as Blake took one of the long skinny candles, blowing air at its wick and a small flame blinked awake. It continued to blaze without Blake's help. He glanced up, noticing Daniel's stare and when he wouldn't stop staring, Blake sheepishly explained, "Candles are good for a lot of spells, but especially for summoning. They'll be able to light our guest's way. Could you um, help me move the rug and I'll put the candles out?"

"Oh- uh, of course," Daniel nodded, snapping out of his dreamy daze. He bent down and easily rolled up the rug that wouldn't even budge when Blake nudged it with his foot. Daniel rolled it and threw it over his shoulder like it was a feathered pillow and tossed it out into the hallway. Once the floor was bare, he drew a large pentagram in the middle.

"Now what?" Daniel asked as he helped move some of the candles to the star's points. Like this, being surrounded by candlelight, Blake felt like they were swallowed by a bonfire. They were the hot coals wrapped up in the flames. It was so cozy, Blake might just fall asleep standing up.

"We need more..." Blake crossed his arms. "*Something* that might drawl the demon. Maybe music. Five hundred years ago what was hot?" On his own, Blake took out his phone and looked up a random video of 16th century music. "Our presence might be enough, but still..."

"You really know what you're talking about, huh?"

"Are you that surprised? I am a Winslow."

"I just don't remember you being so..."

"So what?"

"Magical," Daniel spoke softly, right into Blake's eyes.

Thank God there was a cage around Blake's heart or it might have

punched through his chest. Warmth flooded Blake's face, creeping towards his ears and his neck. He felt too hot to touch. Even standing so near, Daniel was in danger of burning to a crisp.

"Th-thank you," Blake whispered, suddenly feeling shy. He ran his hand through his curls and ducked his head, quickly settling the scroll in the middle of the pentagram. Quickly, he hoped out of the wider circle he drew around the floor.

Tomorrow, the maids were going to be so confused and maybe a little pissed.

Blake instructed Daniel to stand outside the circle. Daniel took the place right across from him, double-checking his footing before looking up and catching Blake's eyes. He smiled a little, making Blake's chest tight and his knees wobbly. Blake couldn't tell what was worse for his health, the alcohol or that smile.

Taking a deep breath, Blake closed his eyes as he raised his hands towards the ritual circle. Magic could feel like static. It could feel like the fizzy bubbles from a tall glass of soda, tickling his face, but all over. Those little sparks had the tendency to escape on their own, but the magic stirred and bristled with joy if Blake was the one that opened the door.

Magic warmed his veins, heating up as the magic rushed through his fingertips. He reached through the veil of this world, moving the curtain to let the demon, Ignacio inside. Just for a visit. Blake repeated that name over and over in his mind, calling to him.

Ignacio. Ignacio. Ignacio.

That really is a mouthful, Blake thought. *I wonder if he'd go by Iggy*.

A chill trickled down Blake's back as he could hear the creek of a door, cringing at the high whining noise it made inside his mind. The heat in the room spiked as fire licked the side of Blake's face, nipping at his exposed skin. Blake's eyes popped opened, but he immediately winced against the bright light. The freckle of fire from each candle suddenly burst and launched into brilliant blazing pillars. The power, the magic that was not his own and rush of heat

suddenly shoved Blake backwards, tossing him into the air. His back slammed into the wall and he crumbled into the bed, causing the old springs to squeak as he bobbed upon landing.

The world felt off-kilter and unbalanced. Everything was tilting upside down, or maybe it was just Blake falling off his bed as he watched the fire dim and a tall figure step outside of the circle. All the candles went out at once and Blake's world was consumed by darkness.

#

Author's Note

Sorry about the wait! When I first wrote this chapter (like over a month ago), I wasn't feeling too good, so her "sick" brain and then, her "less sick" brain was forced to rewrite it and then, my now normal brain had to do a LOT more revisions. It also ended up so much longer than anticipated, but what can you do?

It's so sad we're towards the end of our drunken shenanigans, but there's still more fun to come ;) Who's excited to meet a demon? Lol.

I hope you enjoy the update! And I'm SO excited about what's to come >.<

12. Blake

BLAKE

I opened my eyes, finding myself sitting on a stone bench in a courtyard I didn't recognize. No. It gave me a strange familiar feeling. The same feeling of driving through a small town that I could've sworn I had been through before... but I couldn't recall the name.

Like I suddenly appeared in a greeting card, a butterfly fluttered to the nearest blushing rose bush. This place was crawling with flowers. Even statues were tangled in greenery as the sun sparkled down, which was strange. I remembered it being so cold. I remembered the snow.

I knew I wasn't in the right place, but for whatever reason I wasn't frightened. This was the strangest dream I ever had. It felt so real and yet, I sat weightless as if I was nothing, not made of anything. The gentle breeze tickling the blades of grass went straight through me.

"Why don't you leave, Henry?"

A voice echoed, bouncing off the stone walls. I couldn't quite get my legs to work or stand or run away. The voice came to me, owned by a tall man with dark skin and a long pointy beard, decorated with red jewels that matched the layers of patterned fabric. He looked like he stepped onto the stage performance of Shakespeare's the Twelfth Night.

Calling him handsome was kind of like calling the sun bright.

Obvious.

And yet, didn't give him enough credit.

He chased someone else into the courtyard, throwing his arms out in frustration. "Break ties with Edward and go..."

The other man, Henry shook his head. I could tell just by looking at him that his clothes were nicer, more expensive. The fabric shined differently. This guy practically glowed as the light shined against his pale skin. He

had a head full of golden curls that fluttered in the wind. This must've been a dream because I didn't think angels existed.

"I..." Henry bowed his head, his back still pointed at the other man. He seemed so aware of this man. When the man moved, Henry would too, keeping a distance that caused them to always be out of reach from each other. "I have too many nails in my coffin to escape. I just can't, Nicholas. I can't—" Henry held himself together to keep from falling apart.

He seemed so fragile.

"Then, I'll take you." The man, Nicholas smiled warmly and walked closer, standing right behind Henry without touching him. He just looked down at the blonde with such a loving look in his eyes that made my chest squeeze with jealousy. To be looked at that way would make most of my dreams come true. "I'll snatch you right from under Edward's nose and I'll take you far away from this place..."

Henry spun around, but I couldn't tell what was more surprising. Nicholas' intimate distance or his declaration. They pulled the air towards them, sucking up the air and the light and I realized I was holding my own breath as they leaned towards each other.

Nicholas whispered, gently touching Henry's arm. Henry's whole body seemed to give in to his voice. "You won't be trapped here anymore. We can go somewhere, where Edward will never be able to find us."

By the mention of his name, Henry jumped as if spooked. He pulled his arms free, walking away and putting the distance back between them. "You can't come back here—ever again. Ever."

"Henry."

Nicholas chased after him and I found the strength to pick myself up from the bench. I lagged behind them as Nicholas followed him through the courtyard, past a cluster of trees and more statues willing to keep their secrets.

"Nicholas, if I ever see your face again, I'll- I'll-"

"Henry. I love you."

"No." Henry whipped around as if those four words were the sound of gunfire, the warning shots that announced inescapable danger. His face now grave and bleach white. "I didn't hear that."

Nicholas only chuckled. He raised his arms in complete surrender. Something about him felt so disarmed, so vulnerable as if he was just begging Henry to destroy him. "Do you need me to say it again?"

"God, no. Don't—" Henry's eyes darted around the courtyard, before he ran back to Nicholas' arms. He held on tightly as if there was a fire all around them and Nicholas was the one thing he would save. "Don't you dare ever say that again. Inside these walls. You can't." He dropped his blonde head of curls against Nicholas' chest as his body shuddered. "If something were to happen to you—"

"I'm right here, Henry," Nicholas insisted. He grabbed his lover's face, meeting his eyes when my body shuddered, losing its form like evaporating mist. I suddenly reappeared inside Nicholas' gentle hold. His touch felt so real as he promised. "I will always be with you, even if I can't have you. Even if I'm not allowed to say it, I will love you. I'll protect you."

"Nicholas," I said, unable to help it. My body moved on its own as I leaned up, pressing our lips together. Like that, with my permission, Nicholas held onto me as if I was going to disappear. He wrapped an arm around my back as we slowly walked backwards together until I was pressed against a tree.

Somewhere inside of me, a voice warned me that this may be the last time we kissed. Every kiss could be the last. There wasn't a single part of me that wished to wake up.

#

Author's Note

Quick little dream chapter! Let me know if it's difficult to read the italics. Maybe it's enough to just change to First Person was enough to let everyone know something was different about this chapter. I wanted to avoid confusion, haha.

Next Chapter...

13. Daniel

ADRIAN

Glancing around his bedroom door, Adrian spotted Daniel and Blake desperately trying to be quiet as they drunkenly roamed the halls of the Sagewick palace. He had two options:

1. Follow them and continue to watch over Blake or...

2. Let them be. Let them bond.

They'll have to spend the rest of their lives together, so they might as well start getting along now. Adrian leaned a bit further out as he watched Daniel pull back on Blake's hold around his hand. Daniel shook his head, but Blake just smiled and insisted, "Come on, Danny."

Adrian's brows raised. Danny, huh?

And like that, Daniel crumbled and allowed himself to be dragged again. Adrian gave that hopeless boy a week before he kissed the ground Blake walked upon. No one stood a chance against Blake's charms, the way an intensely cute cat could sway a dog lover. Some things are just too soft not to pet. And Daniel Bellerose seemed like a weak enough man to fall in love with anyone. Adrian planned to toughen him up a bit before he left. Or at least manipulate him into thinking jumping in front of bullet to protect Blake was not only a viable option, but the only option.

Adrian checked his watch and folded back into his room. He sent Emma Winslow a text message: [I'm not worried about Blake and Daniel. Blake will have him whipped in no time.]

With a chuckle, Adrian enjoyed his little joke and got himself ready for bed. He debated going downstairs for a small bottle of A Negative Blood, but his bed called his name. His full name. Middle name too, which only two other people in this world knew. He only

forced himself to stay up a little longer to go through potential candidates. No one seemed quite perfect enough to be Blake's assistant. Adrian only accepted perfection. They needed to be as helpful as they were friendly. Lord knows Blake needed a friend.

The moment he agreed to chaperone Blake to Sagewick was the same moment Adrian realized this would be his final job. After this, after spending the last century with the Winslow family, Adrian craved something new. He grew tired of his quiet life.

From somewhere in the castle, there was a boom and something heavy fell to the ground. Many things crashed and splintered. Adrian stood without a second thought, running out of his room totally barefoot. He could only make it halfway down the hallway. His eyes didn't even grace the next corner when what felt like a wall slammed in front of him and knocked him to the ground hard enough to make him slide all the way back to his room.

The corners of his vision burned as stars twinkled and blinked in and out of his vision. Fear grabbed a hold of his throat when Adrian realized he couldn't move. Couldn't even lift a finger. His last mistake was closing his eyes to gather himself...

He couldn't open his eyes again.

A voice in the corner of his brain whispered, "I'm back."

#

DANIEL

It wasn't often that the crown prince Daniel Bellerose overslept.

Sleeping through the night at all was rare enough. He had grown accustomed to tossing and turning and waking hours of constant thought. Usually, Daniel woke before the sun graced the sky. He never even needed alarms. But that morning wasn't aligned with his normal routine. It wasn't every morning he woke up in a different bed. It wasn't every morning Daniel woke up with a beautiful boy inside his arms.

Peeling his eyes open, Daniel found Blake snuggled against his

chest, Blake's head resting on top of his arm.

Blake's long fingers clutched his shirt and Daniel didn't dare move, too infatuated with Blake's long eye lashes and the curls resting against his forehead. Daniel studied the curve of his bottom lip and the point of his cupid's bow. Underneath his fringe, Daniel could spot a secret mole just against his hairline. Blake's brows furrowed a bit as he snuggled closer to Daniel. Daniel didn't dare move too fast to avoid waking the wizard.

They still wore their clothes from the previous night, shoes and all. Nothing happened, but just sleeping together like this, as close as they were like this still made Daniel's chest squeeze and his muscles feel weak. It somehow felt more intimate.

Blake was warm, the kind of warmth hidden inside a lightbulb, bright and too hot to touch. Without thinking, Daniel used his thumb to smooth the angry little line between Blake's brows and caressed his face. Such soft, powered white skin. Whatever plagued Blake in his sleep melted away and he let out a soft little breath. A chill trickled down Daniel's arms. Someone needed to stop him. His good sense needed to catch back up before he made a fool of himself.

"You know..." A man said, his Italian accent thick.

Daniel jumped, ripping his arm out from underneath Blake, who groaned and nearly rolled completely off the bed. Daniel's brain went wild, short circuiting as he found a man lying on the other side of him, lounging across the satin sheets. He held no presence. He gave off no smell. No warmth. No sign of life, even less than a vampire.

This man was something else entirely. His skin tone wasn't even close to normal, a bright red color that caused the whites of his golden eyes to practically glow. From his short white hair grew two horns, the color of hemp and the texture of rock. These horns curled away from his head like a mountain goat.

The man, or thing, motioned to Blake. The pearl that hung from his left ear waved as he spoke. "Forgive my frankness, but young man,

you know nothing of romance. Let me tell you, you can't seduce someone when they're asleep. Do that again now that he's awake or he'll never fall in love with you."

Daniel's claws extended in the same motion as he went for this creature's neck. Before he could touch him, the creature exploded in a puff of red smoke and appeared again at the end of the bed standing tall. The bottom of Daniel's stomach fell out. Daniel prided himself on his intelligence and his ability to act under pressure. Maybe he was still a little drunk, but Daniel could not keep up with what was happening.

"Holy shit," Blake yelped, suddenly wide awake. But he groaned and flopped back onto his side. He covered his face that was turning green.

"That wasn't nice," the thing smiled, his mouth full of sharp teeth. His teeth almost distracted Daniel from the strange costume he wore, these black tights and poofy shorts. He also wore a tight coat that was covered in a second layer of black lace.

"Who are you?" Daniel asked, his tongue sharpening. "What are you doing in here?"

"Me?" The thing's smile only widened. He touched his chest and hit flesh, something real. Daniel half expected his hand to fall through. "You don't know? You're the ones who asked for me."

As Daniel deciphered that riddle, Blake gagged and lurched forward. Panicked rushed through him as he smacked his hand over his mouth and practically flew to the closest thing that resembled a bin. He ripped out the long fake peacock feathers from a gold vase and replaced them with at least of third of everything he ate and drank last night. Groaning, he crumbled against the wall and held the vase close.

"I remember those days," the creature drawled, poofing again and appeared behind Blake to rub Blake's back as he threw up again. "I developed the most excellent cure for a hangover. Some plain raw eggs, if you can believe it?" He winked at Daniel, who curled his fists.

"Raw eggs?" As if those were the magic words, Blake managed to sit up straight long enough to stare wide-eyed at the creature behind him. Blake looked at him like he saw a ghost. "It can't be... are you... Ignacio?"

"Clever boy," Ignacio smiled and ruffled Blake's curls. He jumped a little and snatched Blake's hand. "Eh? Is this the ring? It's gorgeous. Maybe there's hope for Daniel yet."

"You're joking." Daniel had to laugh. He threw the blankets off his legs and joined them. Standing now, he realized this creature wasn't as tall or muscular. Ignacio had a lithe form, reminding Daniel of the Faye folk, of long stemmed lilies and tall grass. A fragile thing with sharp teeth. Dangerous.

"What do you mean?" Ignacio now followed Daniel as he searched the filthy room for Blake's pile of dishes. He managed to find a cleanish looking glass and a pitcher of what was once ice water and now was tepid plain water. Ignacio insisted, "You two summoned me last night. Not by mistake, am I correct? You two wanted to speak with me and here I am. Truthfully, I'm delighted to be here. This way I can come to the wedding! You two make a handsome couple."

The events of last night came crashing down and around Daniel. He looked at this creature again with his horns and his red skin and that knowing look in his golden eyes. "You. You're the one that cursed us."

"Curse?" Ignacio's eyes nearly popped out of his head. "Is that what your families call it now? Back in my day—"

"Five hundred years ago," Blake mumbled and rubbed the side of his head.

"It was just called a deal. I made a deal with your ancestor." He side-eyed Blake, who had decided to empty out the rest of his stomach. But Daniel noticed the choice of words. He noticed that look. There was more to this deal than anyone knew, something that was lost along the last five hundred years.

"Well, we want out of the deal," Daniel stated. He crossed his arms, pointing his chin up as he faced the demon. "Blake and I have discussed it and we think that we shouldn't be the ones that must pay for our families' debts."

"You..." Ignacio seemed taken aback, deflated even. He blinked at them, back and forth and finally landing on Daniel. "You two don't want to get married?"

"Not really," Blake said immediately, which for whatever reason annoyed Daniel, but Daniel figured it was more likely the confused look from Ignacio that drove him crazy. Not Blake.

"It's not what we want," Daniel said as he bent down to hand Blake the water. "Here, you dork. Look at me, you're never drinking again."

"Agreed."

Blake took a swig, swishing the water around his mouth before spitting it back out. Ignacio chuckled a little and shook his head. "That's nice that you two can agree on something, but I'm not going to break this deal. There's nothing you can offer me to change my mind. I've been waiting five hundred years for this..."

Ignacio turned as if finished with this conversation. He held his hands out with pointy black fingernails, eagerly wiggling his fingers. He opened Blake's wardrobe that was actually an entertainment station and poked the middle of his TV to see what would happen.

The back of Daniel's neck felt hot. Sometimes it felt like someone was flicking the back of his head when he was frustrated. He wasn't going to be ignored by this demon. "Nothing? I doubt that. Surely, you get something more out of this than a wedding."

"Why yes, the look on your faces."

Daniel scowled, wondering if he could simply break this deal by wringing this demon's neck. "Tell me what you get and we'll figure out how to bring it to you without getting married."

"Look at it from my perspective. It's quite selfish to ask out of the contract right before I'm about to receive my payment. Even for a demon that's a long time to wait and now, you want me to wait longer? I don't think so."

"And I'm telling you, we'll pay for the gifts you've given us some other way."

"You see, that's just not possible."

"Hey—" Blake squinted, trying to properly form the words. "Can I call you Iggy?"

"Of course you can," Ignacio smiled, suddenly a little weak in the knees for the human still on the floor.

Daniel took a smooth step between them. "Tell me why it isn't possible, and I'll tell you why it is. My job is to solve problems."

Blake not so subtly snorted, which made Daniel snap his arm out and shove him. Blindly, Blake hit him back. Their bottled up frustrations were exploding out of them in this slapping war. If Daniel's school tutors or nannies saw him like this, they'd tell him to face a wall until he remembered his manners. Something about Blake just brought the twelve-year-old out of Daniel.

"Stop that!" Putting his hands between them, Ignacio told them, "It's impossible because of the deal we made and its terms..."

With a sigh, Ignacio started explaining again, but with a bit more patience. "Five hundred years ago, I made a deal that I would save your ancestor's life—" Ignacio pointed a sharp finger towards Daniel and then turned his sights to Blake, who managed to stand on his two feet, still holding the vase as if it were a cherished stuffed doll. "And I would ensure that your family would thrive through the ages. In doing so, your families' magic and power and wealth has grown and prospered for five hundred years and when these two powers connect, it'll be enough power to set me free. I want to become mortal."

"Then, we'll find a way to make you human. That's the real deal,

right? If Blake and I can figure out how to make you human without joining our magic, you'll keep your end of the deal too." Daniel quickly said without knowing how he could possibly make that happen. "We can do it. Somehow."

"I thought demons were all powerful," Blake said. "You can't just help yourself?"

"No," Ignacio shook his head. He started wandering again and found a nearby lamp, flicking it on and off, his eyes glimmering against the flash of light. "While I'm under contract, I can only use my magic to help my current deal run more smoothly."

"What does that mean for us, then? You can only use your magic to make sure we get married. What does that even look like?"

"Don't ask him," Daniel tried to say as Ignacio cheered:

"I'm glad you asked!"

Ignacio clapped his hands and from nowhere and everywhere, red rose petals fluttered all around them and across every surface. They all fell randomly with the exception of a line of petals falling into the shape of a heart on top of the bed. Candles ignited and suddenly, Blake's radio played Marvin Gaye's Let's Get It On.

A burst of laughter exploded past Blake's lips. "That was amazing."

Daniel rolled his eyes. "You think that's amazing? You can do that."

"No, I can't. I can't just clap my hands and do whatever I want. My magic is different. He's a demon!"

"Not for very much longer," Ignacio said and raised two crossed fingers. "Hopefully."

Before Daniel could argue more, there was a knock on the door and his mother, Adele's voice seeped between the cracks. "Hello? Blake? Are you awake, dear? I want to talk to you about yesterday—"

"Uh, Adele! Just one second-!" Blake tried to stop her, but it was too late. As soon as the door swung open, Ignacio disappeared in a puff

of smoke. Daniel reached for him, but only found a handful of air. Adele waltzed right inside with Adrian, Eitienne and Michael at her tail.

She froze, her eyes widening as she took in the room. As she looked around, Daniel saw the same incriminating evidence from the fresh petals, the empty bottle of booze and the disheveled bed. Almost as messy as their appearances.

Despite the fact nothing happened...

It looked like everything had happened.

With a blush that just made them look more guilty, Blake raised his hands, "I know it looks strange! But nothing happened."

"Nothing happened?" Adrian crossed his arms, rolling back his shoulders and growing in size. "Then, how do you explain that?" He motioned to Blake's bare arm and the bite mark left by Daniel's idiotic mouth. A bit too late, Blake rolled his sleeve back down.

"Is everything alright?" One of the maids, Natalia piped up. A horde of maids were trying to wiggle through the cracks between the men at the door.

Jumping to attention, Michael pushed them all back and slammed the door shut. He shouted, "Everything's fine! Your assistance is unnecessary! Why don't you...." The vein in his forehead throbbed as he tried to come up with some chore. "Why don't you polish the West Wing!"

"The entire west wing?"

"Just go!" Adele shouted and Daniel could hear them gasp and scurry away. Adele Bellerose did not raise her voice. Hell was freezing over.

Daniel took a step back, suddenly going back in time and turning into a little kid that just got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. His stomach twisted. His father seemed to be scratching his head as Adrian shook his head at the ceiling with an incredulous laugh.

Nervously, Daniel looked at Adele like she was an incoming car crash. His small mother's brow narrowed, and she open her mouth to begin the kind of berating that will shame Daniel into oblivion, everyone's phones started to ding. Michael opened his phone first and somehow, he became even paler to the point of being translucent. He handed the worse person his phone, Adele.

She looked at the screen and her lips thinned to one angry line. "Daniel Gabriel Bellerose, I am so angry I just might go blind." She showed Daniel the screen and dared him, "Try telling me again that nothing happened."

Right there in bright blue light was a series of pictures of the night from some not even attractive guy touching Blake's leg and leaning in too close for them to just be talking about the weather. The press even got a snapshot of them almost kissing, their lips a hair apart. There was a picture of Frances and Blake dancing. Quite a few pictures of them taking shots. Then, finally the slideshow of humiliation ended with Daniel carrying a drunken Blake to the car.

The headline read:

Sagewick's new prince of the party. The wedding real? Or a hoax?

Daniel side-eyed Blake who looked like he needed to throw up for a hundred new reasons. He whispered, "We're fucked."

#

Author's Note

I'm so happy to be back! I've missed you guys immensely, but I might have missed the story more. I've been so excited to introduce Ignacio! Welcome our demonic puppet master who is a Blake and Daniel Stan first. Demon second. Lol.

And we even got an Adrian POV? This chapter is wild! Please don't forget to leave a comment with all thoughts, feeling and theories. We love a good theory in this house.

Also, my life has recently been ruined by Thai BL Dramas. I've watched like four in the past two weeks. This is why I can't watch

TV or start anything because I will watch it to completion. Lol.

14. Blake

BLAKE

"It was my idea," Blake insisted, trying to meet Adrian's eyes. Adrian hadn't look at him since he started bandaging up Blake's arm. "Don't be mad."

"I'm not mad," Adrian said, totally mad. "Just disappointed."

Blake's body deflated, sputtering like a leaky balloon. "That's even worse."

"At Daniel."

"What?" Daniel did a double take from his chair across from the Blake. The boys were almost immediately separated, a couch and several disapproving adults between them. Daniel looked around his parents who were arguing about the best punishment for them. He shouted, "It was his idea!"

"Danny," Blake gawked and for a fleeting second, Adele's eyes flickered into his, but she quickly looked back at her husband. "You threw me under the bus so fast."

"Daniel should know better than to just bite you. And who knows if one of the maids saw your arm. It's feral to go around biting people for fun," Adrian insisted and finished fastening the bandage to Blake's arm, but his hands didn't move. His arm seemed to look so small, so fragile in Adrian's rough hands, like gigantic tree roots wrapped around a rose.

"Blake," he said, willing Blake to meet his eyes. A small coil in Blake's chest tightened as he drowned in the guilt. Blake never gave him trouble. Link and Damien were the problem children. Not Blake. Disappointing Adrian was truly painful, like a cringe he couldn't shake. "Promise me you'll be more careful."

"It's just Danny."

"I don't hear a promise."

"I promise."

With a small smile, Adrian dragged his thumb across the bandage and goosebumps trickled down Blake's arm. Before Blake could react to such a gentle touch, Adrian stood up. Nobody seemed to notice, but Blake. Everyone was distracted by Michael shouting into his phone that was wedged between his shoulder and his ear. He was busy also sweeping up all the rose petals from the floor into one great red pile. "I said I want names! Not excuses! Who tipped you off?"

Apparently, Michael knew someone from the local Sagewick Star, the tabloid that printed those pictures. Blake couldn't believe they came out with that article so fast. He was never newsworthy before. He grabbed the magazine from the marble coffee table. It was a sick fascination like a horrific traffic accident that he couldn't look away from. How could he be so stupid?

Daniel moved to the next couch, sneaking down the cushions until he bumped Blake's elbow. He glanced over the top of the glossy magazine and snorted. "I look like an idiot," he said, pointing to his picture. "Look. I have a nose hair sticking out. Excellent. That's really what I wanted to be captured for all eternity."

Blake chuckled, studying Daniel's face. He didn't look bad in the pictures. It was impossible for him not to look good. Even in his disheveled state. Daniel took the magazine and folded it up. "This isn't suitable for consumption. It's hardly even suitable for the bin. I feel bad for the trash."

With an easy toss, Daniel sunk the magazine in the nearest trashcan and Blake couldn't help but laugh again. He nudged his knee back into Daniel's and whispered, "Thanks."

"No, need to thank me. Just being honest."

"It's fine if they fooled around!" Etienne suddenly insisted with a

roar that made Blake straighten to attention. "They just have to be more discreet. For all we know, someone inside this castle tipped off the press to follow Blake and Frances to the club. The last thing we need is for anyone to find out what Daniel did. I swear," he finally looked at his son. "Overnight you've forgotten everything we've ever taught you."

"See," Adrian said as he took the broom from Michael to free up some of Daniel's assistant's attention. Now he could properly let the tabloid have it. "I told you it's Daniel's fault."

"It doesn't matter who's fault it is," Adele said, raising her hands. Still in the air, her fingers curled into her palms and her whole body inflated as she took a calming deep breath. "What matters is our next step."

"For a start," Eitienne began, his voice full and grand as if he was speaking to more than just a handful of people, but to an audience. The man didn't need to shout for anyone to listen. "We tread with caution and only put trust into each other. We're already in a sour state. The last thing we need is people finding out about the curse. This marriage can't handle another scandal. It'll all be for nothing if the coven turns their backs on us."

Adele nodded. "You're right. Somehow, we need to satisfy the press and our coven. They have to put faith in us that Blake is not only the right choice, but the only choice..." Adele's eyes sparkled. Blake was blinded by the lightbulb that appeared over her head as the idea struck her. "We just have to show them how committed you two are to this wedding." She whipped her head round at the boys, making her curls swirl and bounce. "You'll plan it."

"What?" Blake and Daniel said together.

"You'll plan the entire thing and the country can watch. You'll chose the colors and the décor, the place and the music. You'll be photographed going to tastings and you'll visit local vendors." At this point, she was on a roll and no could stop her now. "And we'll have a huge crowd at the wedding as many people as possible with as many groomsmen as we can muster. We'll invite every vendor and every from high society."

"We're supposed to do this?" Daniel asked. "But what about all my other responsibilities?"

"Gone. I'll have Josephine take over all your meetings and she'll take over foreseeing your involvement in the Boys and Girls club. However, I do expect you to continue your social engagements. It'll be the first time you'll actually use your plus one."

"But—"

"No buts." She raised her long dark finger. "You asked for this."

Eitienne nodded. "Michael will help arrange your schedules and set up meetings with local vendors. This wedding needs to scream Sagewick."

"The wedding is only a couple weeks away," Blake reminded them, already feeling hot and sweaty underneath the collar. Blake never planned anything. That was the best part about being the youngest child. He was just sort of dragged along to everything.

"Yeah," Daniel agreed. "And Blake doesn't know the first thing about being a prince. He's not prepared for dinner parties or balls or—"

"Then, you better start teaching him."

"You're going to need your own assistant," Eitienne added, motioning to Blake.

Before he could think about it, Blake just blurted, "I do have one!"

"What?" Adrian perked up. "I didn't approve an assistant."

"Daniel found him for me. His name's Ignacio."

Daniel snapped a wide eyed look of horror.

Adrian frowned. "That doesn't spark confidence. I want to meet him."

"Of course, he's coming by later—" Just as Blake was speaking, there was a knock on the door, and everyone froze. If possible, Blake's

face turned even more red. "Um, that could be him."

With a sigh, Michael opened the door. "Can we help you?"

"Hello! Hello!" Ignacio sang as he sauntered through the door, almost like an entirely different person. Though, Blake remembered, he wasn't a person at all. Ignacio's red skin switched to a warm brown, but his stark white hair stayed while his horns were totally gone. He switched his renaissance costume for a sleek black suit.

"Hopefully, I'm not interrupting," Ignacio said as he walked towards Blake, but Adrian stepped into his path with a narrowed brow and crossed arms. Ignacio even took a staggering step back. "Eh? My! H-Hello, nice to meet you, my name is Ignacio."

He offered his hand, but Adrian didn't even look at it. "Outside."

"Now?" Ignacio asked a silly question. Adrian took a step forward, right at Ignacio, which forced the demon to retreat backwards. Opening the door for them, Michael kept out of their way as Adrian bullied Ignacio into the hallway.

With that, the King and Queen left too. As she closed the door, Adele called, "And I think we shall begin having family dinners every night. No exceptions."

"What a fine idea," her husband agreed.

"That way we can know if everything is staying on track." She closed the door to keep any argument from following them.

Only Michael remained, who muttered as he smashed his fingers into his phone. "I don't see why I also must be punished. I'm not the one having a quarter life crisis and snapping my fangs at mortals. Oh, well. Guess I'll just call all of sodding Sagewick to get appointments."

"Start with the boutique," Daniel requested. "That'll be easy."

"Already on it. I've been wanting to burn those shoes since he arrived."

"Hey!" Blake said, feeling more than just a little offended. This was a personal offense. Those shoes had seen him through a lot. Sure, there was a hole at the bottom and if it rained, his socks always got soaked. And sure, the white part of the shoes had aged and yellowed and the laces had frayed and snapped off, but Blake was still attached.

"Don't worry," Daniel said with a devilish smirk. "We'll have them framed."

Crossing his arms, Blake sunk into his chair. "I want them preserved in gold."

"Only the best."

"We have an appointment for noon," Michael said.

Daniel stood up, checking his watch for the time. He nodded. "Alright. I say we meet at the doors by eleven. We'll grab coffee on the way. Think about what you'd like for lunch and Michael will have it sent to the shop..." Daniel was already walking out the door with Michael by his side. They fell into step together, perfectly synchronized. Blake felt like he was getting a rare peek behind the curtain. "I wonder if we can have Jim expedite any tailoring we need done. Everything must be ready by tomorrow. Money isn't an issue. Of course, we still need to shop for ornaments as well..."

Then they were gone.

It was the first Blake was alone in quite some time. So, for the first time, he let out a long breath and slouched inside his chair. He looked down at his hands and admired his engagement ring, the sapphire and the little emeralds inside the mouths of golden snakes. It was strange that this was all five hundred years in the making.

Five hundred years felt laughable when Blake had spent the last twenty-one years of his life absolutely hating Daniel Bellerose... well, that was only a little dramatic. Blake had spent ten years loathing Danny. Eleven year old Blake would've thrown a fit if someone told him he'd be forced to marry Danny. Fourteen year old Blake, who just realized how much he liked guys over girls

would've pretended to hate the idea. Teenager Blake hated Danny, but deep inside that cave of hatred was a small pebble of a crush. Just because he was cute.

Not because he had any resemblance of a personality. That demon must be disappointed. After waiting five hundred years, Ignacio discovers that his scheme was truly impossible that it was going to take another five hundred years for Blake to purposely marry Daniel.

"Oh, before I forget," Daniel suddenly appeared again at the door.

Startled, Blake jumped to his feet. He stared wide eyed at Daniel's boyish smile and the glint in his eyes. Daniel said, "That spell was bloody brilliant. Maybe that demon is on to something. We are a good pair as long as I haven't done anything to make you angry, so I'll try to avoid it." He tipped his head a little, a small bow. When he perked up again, his dazzling grin made Blake's stomach acids do the Cha Cha Slide. "Dress warmly, it's still snowing. See you in thirty."

With that, he closed the door and Blake's chest tightened. He didn't realize he was doing it, but he spun his ring round and around his finger.

It took one day for Daniel Bellerose to smile and make Blake's entire face turn red again.

Blake feared what would happen the next ten years. The next ten days. Even the next ten minutes, Blake wasn't sure what he should expect.

#

Author's Note

And here we go! Time to plan a wedding! Give Blake a makeover and maybe fall in love??? Only if we have time. Lol. And don't worry, Adrian did not kill Ignacio. He'll be back and as Blake assistant? What could POSSIBLY go wrong? Or really right? Hmmm.

It's kind of short set-up chapter, but necessary. So! Don't forget to

leave a comment with your thoughts and feelings ~ Thank you for your support. I can't say it enough <3

15. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

Daniel glanced at Michael again, the question so close to the tip of his tongue, it threatened to fall through his teeth. But he didn't. He just wandered around the circular racks across the show floor, passing the walls of expensive blazers and shelves of shiny shoes. It smelled like leather here and a bit like cologne, but whether that was from their supply or from the actual people working there, Daniel wasn't sure. It was a strong enough musk that tickled his noise hairs.

They arrived at the Gentleman's Boutique just moments ago with a full party: Blake, Daniel, Michael, Adrian and that demon, Ignacio. All morning and day, Daniel's nerves frayed at the edges, feeling messy and too itchy to bare. This demon was going to be tricky to figure out, but he had to be swayed somehow. Daniel spent his life bargaining with people, exchanging favors for goods and services. When a simple smile wasn't enough.

As they walked up to the door, Blake whispered to Daniel, "The Gentleman's Boutique sounds like a sex shop—"

Daniel bit through his smile and warned the funny little wizard, "Behave or I shall leave you in the car without the windows cracked."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

Blake smiled and a section of hell felt a chill. It was a miracle how well Daniel was doing. He wasn't sure where this sense of humor came from. No, it was always there. Just buried beneath years of etiquette and stress. It was as if Blake came to Sagewick with a shovel and dug it out himself. Blake was maneuvered to the fitting

room so Jim, the best Tailor in the shop, could get the proper measurements as Adrian wandered off to do whatever Adrian did. Daniel rarely questioned things that worked.

"Is there something on my face?" Michael asked as he laid another blazer across his arm. He faced the prince with a raised brow. "You've been staring."

"Have I?" Daniel wondered out loud, lagging slightly behind with his thoughts still swirling. He caught back up to reality and admitted, "Sorry, but I do want to ask you something. Actually, I need advice."

"From me?" Michael's brow narrowed.

"Well, you're the only person other than my parents, who's married. May I ask, did you have a big wedding?"

"Hmm..." Michael hummed, apparently needing a second to adjust. This might be the very first personal question Daniel has ever asked of his assistant. Michael's usual porcelain skin was stained with a rosy blush. "Well, I didn't want one, but Wesley wouldn't stop inviting people. I could've strangled him. That's werewolves for you, I suppose. If they don't invite their fifth cousin three times removed, it's an insult to the entire pack." He shook his head, suddenly pulled back to that time as Daniel made a mental note to remember Michael's husband's name was Wesley. "Then, Wes' mother brought on some wedding planner to help, but all I could do was stress about what she was doing. I hardly remember my wedding. I blacked out."

"Would you do it again?"

"Yes because I get to be married to my best friend."

"That's lovely," Daniel said, surprised by the answer. It was a nice sentiment, indeed.

Michael cleared his throat and turned, so his back faced Daniel. "Yes, well that was years ago and we're not quite in the same position. I think I've grabbed enough of the basics for Blake. I doubt

he even owned a white shirt. Shall I check on them?"

Before he could make a mad dash out of the room, Blake poked his head through the door. He jumped. His eyes widened at the two vampires staring at him. He seemed to be caught in the act.

"Are you trying to steal a peek?" Michael asked.

Blake frowned. "I just want to make sure you guys aren't making me look like Danny's duplicate. I still want to look like me."

"I'm going to chose not to be insulted by that," Daniel raised his voice over the racks of clothes. He thumbed through a series of soft velvet options.

"It's not an insult! You look..." Blake swallowed. Even from here, Daniel could hear his heart speed up a little. It was like standing in a cold room as far away from the fireplace as possible. Daniel wanted to be on that side of the room, soaking up Blake's warmth. Blake admitted, "You look like a prince. I know I need to..." He waved his hands around, searching for the right words. "... to look the part, but I still want to recognize myself."

"You're going to look better than you've ever looked before," Michael insisted, pushing Blake back through the door. "Don't worry."

"But-"

"No buts and the next time I see you, you better be rid of those ghastly converses. I rather you be barefoot."

As the door closed, Blake eyed Daniel for just a moment, giving him this sort of pitiful helpless look that made Daniel smile. He sort of wished Blake stayed. Daniel could feel the stillness in the room and the quiet created too much space. He felt aimless all of a sudden, like he was dropped into the middle of the ocean in a lonely canoe with no paddles.

Before they even stepped into the shop, Daniel knew what he wanted to pick out for Blake, what would be a more mature version of the wizard. Daniel rarely second guessed himself. But a funny

thought struck him and he walked up to one of the associates, a younger man that Daniel didn't recognize. Must be new.

"Excuse me," Daniel said and the young man straightened to attention. His glasses nearly bounced right off his nose. "Would it be possibly to grab something from another store and bring it here?"

"Of course, your highness. They told me to do anything you asked."

Daniel winced, holding back his comment about context being everything. He forced down his snickering and said, "Wonderful. It won't take long..."

#

BLAKE

Closing his eyes, Blake took a deep breath and reminded himself that he just needed to trust Daniel and Michael. They weren't going to let him walk around looking like an idiot. Link wasn't around to poke fun and Damien couldn't throw his unwanted opinions around about modesty. The tailor here, Jim Crawley was kind and said only nice things about his strangely long legs and stumpy chest. He also said Blake had lovely shoulders.

"Blake," Ignacio said, snapping Blake out of it. His eyes popped open as Ignacio came strolling to the couches with a glass bowl of M&M's in his hands. "I've found us some little chocolates. Totally unguarded. I couldn't believe it!"

Panicked, Blake jumped up and grabbed the bowl from him, setting it on the nearest side table. "You're not supposed to take the whole bowl! Just a handful."

"There were no rules posted by this bowl."

"It's just common courtesy."

"If it's so common, why don't I know it?" Ignacio asked, feeling smug enough to snatch the bowl back. He plopped on the couch and threw a few into his mouth. His chewing grated on Blake's nerves.

"You've been gone for five hundred years, Iggy. I'm sure there's plenty of things you need to catch up on."

"Alright then, I understand," Iggy tossed the bowl in the air and Blake's stomach sank. He lunged to grab it, but the bowl disappeared in a puff of red smoke. The next second, a loud thunk hit somewhere in another room and then, a quick shattering noise made Blake cringe. Ignacio flinched, still tense all over. "I missed."

Blake sighed and sat next to the demon, unable to keep himself from staring. He couldn't believe Ignacio was here, in the flesh. Seeing him felt like living an out of body experience. A part of Blake wondered if he reached out to touch Ignacio, would his hand slip right through?

He asked, his curiosity making him squirm, "How can you do that? I thought your magic was restricted."

"It still is but being near you let's me do some small things," Ignacio explained as he stretched his arms and wiggled his fingers until a small breeze made the curtains flutter. "It's how I can disguise myself." He grinned and Blake could almost see his tag wagging happily like a little puppy who just performed a trick.

"When you become mortal, will all of that go away?"

"I think so."

"And you still want to part with it, the magic? Why do you want to become human?"

Ignacio smiled, turning onto his side as he looked at Blake as if he was the sweetest looking kitten. His long fingers brushed the curls out of Blake's eyes. "I've been alive for quite some time and I have made lots of deals with all kinds of men and women with this magic. This magic has brought me incredible luxury... But it has also brought me incredible unhappiness. Under contract, I cannot say no and I cannot avoid contracts. They keep me alive.... so, I am sometimes bound to serve corrupt people, who simply want power over good men and women. The last person who I made a deal with was a vicious man.... I've grown tired of giving power to vicious

men."

"Are you talking about my ancestor?"

"Eh? No, no, no, no," Ignacio sat up, shaking his hands. "Your ancestor was kind." With a warm smile, Ignacio laid his hands over his heart to keep it from flying away. "Very gentle to a demon like me."

"What was his name?"

"Henry..."

Blake's mouth gaped slightly as a rush of realization washed over him, swept him back into the ocean like an unforgiving tide. It was like the sound was sucked out of the world, except this room. The clock ticked louder. The hair on the back of Blake's neck stood.

"Henry Winslow."

"A-and-" Blake couldn't speak past his dry mouth. He swallowed and tried to pull it together. "And what about Daniel's—"

Please, don't say Nicholas, Blake begged in his head. Please, don't say Nicholas. Please, let this just be a strange coincidence.

Before he could ask, the doors to the boutique swung open. Frances stuck his head in first and when he saw Blake, he grinned wickedly and rushed inside with his arms out. He wore tight acid wash jeans and a turtleneck underneath a leather jacket. He wore the same boots as always that added a few inches to his height. "There you are! I can't believe I wasn't invited to this 80's style make-over montage moment. I'll forgive you if you let me give you a haircut."

"A haircut?" Blake gawked.

"Fine, I'll just shave your eyebrows."

"No!"

"This already doesn't feel fun enough. I'm sure Prince of the Tightly Wound and his assistant of the damned have already picked out the

boring pieces. You—" He pointed at Ignacio with a serious look "—seem fun. I like the pearl earring thing." He reached his hand out and Ignacio took it, despite his shock. "Together, I've decided we are team fun whoever you are."

"Maybe you should introduce yourself before pulling anyone into your schemes."

"Schemes," France snickered at the term. "You're a prince for a few days and we're throwing big words like 'schemes' around."

"Frances."

"Fine," the man sighed with his entire body, but still held onto Ignacio's hand from the greeting. "It's a pleasure to meet you." With a flourish of his hand, Frances bowed gracefully, down to the tips of his toes. "I am a fellow Prince of the night and designated best friend of Daniel Bellerose, his royal highness Frances Petrovic of the Red Rose coven."

"What a mouthful, how'd you memorize all that?"

France flicked his head up with a grin bright enough to burn sunspots in Blake's vision. He said, "Came right off the top of my head."

"Well, color me impressed. I have no fancy titles. I'm just Ignacio." He tipped his head slightly.

"He's my assistant," Blake quickly interjected before Frances studied the demon closer.

"He's also my comrade," Frances added. Thankfully not the curious type when it involved people other than himself. He dragged Ignacio towards the showroom and Blake jumped to his feet, horrified to be left alone in this place. Frances' voice boomed through the small shop, probably reaching Michael and infuriating him, "I saw some leathers pants by the window that you must own so I can steal them."

Blake held his arms out and let the two threw as many items of colorful clothes as possible. With a laugh, Blake took a silky scarf to

the face and shook it lose, back around his neck. "You two are going to make me look like a peacock."

A loud cough broke up the fun and they all turned around at once to find Michael's dower look. "Frances, how long did this hurricane take? A second? Less than a moment?"

"Upon arrival," Frances grinned, which made Michael roll his eyes out of the room.

"Might as well bring it all," Daniel said, motioning them to follow.

They all walked back to the parlor, where a small stage stood in front of a few ornate mirrors. The staff grabbed the clothes from both parties, setting them up on racks and inside the small dressing room. It looked more like a wooden phone booth with a red curtain for a door.

Mr. Crawley came in with a small smile on his lips. He was a man of elegant curves and soft wrinkles framing his face. He had a twirled white mustache and slicked back thin hair to match. He also wore his tweed suit so well that he looked more expensive than even the prince.

"Let's see..." Mr. Crawley picked the round glasses from his chest and placed them on his nose. "From what I understand we need the essentials. So, we'll try a few things on and I'll do a few pins here and there. Then, you can just pick whatever you like. How's that sound?" He smiled at Blake.

"Thank you," Blake said.

"It's my pleasure, your highness."

A blush burned its way across Blake's cheeks, and he sucked in his breath to keep from looking too mortified. He still wasn't used to this.

Like that, Blake tried on a flurry of dress pants, crisp button ups and blazers until he couldn't even tell the difference between colors anymore. He turned on the platform, raising his arms to show off a gray suit without a tie.

"We get it, he's handsome," Frances rolled his eyes, sprawled across the couch while everyone else stood. "But he's a wizard for goodness sake, can't he wear a bit of color?"

"We have a series of colorful ties," Mr. Crawley offered.

Michael snorted. "And have our new prince looking tacky? I think not."

"Thank you, Michael," Daniel chuckled. "It's perfect, Jim. But can you fetch something for today, something that will at lest do for the afternoon?"

"Of course," Mr. Crawley nodded, raising to his feet. "I have something in mind."

He stalked out of the room with Frances nipping his heals. "What about that leather set?"

"Frances," Michael barked, chasing after him. "You're a prince, you can buy your own damn leathers. I'm shocked you don't already own something hideous like it."

Blake chuckled, but released a sigh as the space opened up for him to breathe.

"Wait," Daniel said suddenly, and Blake groaned, which just made Daniel chuckle. "It's okay. Just one last thing I'll make you try on, I promise."

"You can't fool me. I know you're full of it," Blake said, watching Daniel hurry out of the room and then, quickly walk back inside with a plastic bag. In all this decadence, Blake almost did a doubletake at such a modern, common thing. "What is that?"

"Blake," Daniel said and approached, and Blake's toes curled. His stomach had a funny little feeling as Daniel drew near. His face grew hot again. Daniel stood close, closer than he probably needed to stand. "I don't want you to not feel like yourself. I like you the way you are."

"Danny, don't lie."

"I swear," Daniel held up one hand and with the other, crossed his heart.

Blake chuckled and accepted the bag. He found a box, unveiling a pair of brand new converses. "Why—?"

"You don't have to change. I like to wear nice clothes because they help me feel confident."

Blake gawked. "You need to feel more confident?"

"I'm just saying, you should treasure yourself. You deserve nice clothes. No matter the style," he teased, and Blake gripped the box tighter. It was silly to suddenly feel like this was a precious item, when it was just another pair of shoes, but he's never been given a gift from a boy.

The thunder of Frances and Michael fighting loomed closer and Daniel dipped his head as he took a step away. He retreated beside Ignacio, who was grinning to himself. Michael continued talking, in his own conversation, "There's also a fancy dinner at the end of the week. I already have a grey suit prepared for his highness, so we'll need something else for Blake. They can't be matchy-matchy."

"He can't have red," Frances raised his hand. "I'll be in red."

"You're going?"

Frances mirrored his horrified look in spite and Michael just huffed, stalking far away.

Speaking up, Ignacio gained the attention of the room, "Prince Daniel, what is your favorite color?"

"Blue," Daniel answered.

"A blue suit then," Mr. Crawley understood and made a note before anyone could argue. "And your Highness, I shall have you stay an extra moment."

"Of course, Jim," Daniel agreed. "But whatever for?"

"Well, from what I understand," Mr. Crawley smiled. "I need to make you a special tuxedo before the end of the month. Congratulations, sir." He bowed a little and Daniel rubbed his neck, flustered by the announcement.

"Yes. Thank you, Jim." Daniel's eyes flickered at Blake, who flushed by the attention. He then looked down at Blake's hands, which had started fiddling with his engagement ring without thinking. Realizing himself, Blake dropped his hands.

Ignacio giggled. "This has been so fun."

#

Author's Note

Hello friends! I'm so sleeeppyyy, but I was so happy to write this update. It's longer than usual, which is a nice change. And we got to welcome Frances back! Any scene with Frances is suddenly my favorite scene. He brings an energy that I can't help but thrive inside.

Please let me know what you think from Michael and Daniel's exchange to Iggy unveiling the name of Blake's ancestor. Do you think it's the same Henry from Blake's dreams? What did you think about Daniel's gift? And do you think Iggy and Frances will get along?

Hope to see you soon with another update! I hope everyone has a safe and happy pride!

16. Blake/Daniel/Blake

BLAKE

Blake ran his hands up and down his thighs, probably staining his brand new black sacks with his sweat. Slacks. He owned slacks on purpose. Outside of a retail setting. Before they left the shop, Mr. Crawley and Michael dressed Blake like a doll in a tan wool coat on top of a black turtleneck, black pants, a belt (which he had never owned) and the shiniest pair of shoes Blake had ever seen. He could look down at his feet and his horrified look was reflected back at him.

Daniel's dark hand laid across Blake's as if grabbing his hand in time before he floated off into the dark recesses of space. He squeezed a little, his touch cool, but welcoming. Like the forgiving breeze during an unforgiving summer.

"This will be easy," Daniel said it like he meant it.

Blake scrunched his nose and looked back outside, at the reporters and the photographers fixing their cameras. "No offense, but I don't believe you."

"Stop worrying about them."

"That's actually not possible."

"Okay," he nodded. "Then, when you start to get nervous, all you have to do is look at me. If I'm not worried, then you don't have to be worried." Looking down, Blake sat his free hand on top, rubbing his thumb across Daniel's skin. Daniel leaned closer, ever-so-slightly and whispered, "Deep breath."

Blake met his eyes and made a big show of filling his chest and raising his shoulders, before letting it all out. Daniel seemed satisfied by it. Maybe even more than just satisfied. Delighted maybe.

"Are you two ready?" Michael asked from the driver's seat, still on the phone with security, who were getting into position all around the holiday store: Holly Jolly Wonderland. They'd been parked for a while, so a crowd of people had begun to form too. People eager to see the prince. Ignacio sat in the front, resting against the headrest, lovingly sighing at Blake and Daniel like they were cuddling puppies.

Flushing, Blake took his hand away first and Daniel fell back against his seat. Quickly, Blake was ushered out of the car first with Adrian holding the door open. Adrian gave him an encouraging smile, but before they could speak, Daniel took his hand. A surprised jolt went up Blake's spine as the entirety of his focus landed on Daniel. Daniel and his wide back. Daniel with his head held high as he waved to the photographers and to his people.

Blake decided to categorize that smile as Daniel's diplomatic smile. Nicer than his pompous-I-know-better-than-everyone-smile, but not as good as his true smile. That honest smile was up against his drunken smile, the one he wore when his eyes were all gooey and looked at Blake like he wasn't that gangly fifteen year old anymore. Blake wondered if he'd ever get that look from a sober Daniel.

If he did, Blake might burst into flames.

Entering the shop, Blake was struck with the smell of balsam fir and cinnamon. He nearly sneezed his brains out on impact. The entire store was riddled with Christmas trees, wrapped up and decorated in all kind of ways from all white trees with golden ornaments to trees covered in paper snowflakes and trees every color of the rainbow. The walls were covered in ornaments, more ornaments than Blake thought possible. He was a long way away from the handmade popsicle stick ornaments back home.

And it was all theirs to explore.

As Daniel let his hand drop, Blake stayed glue to the front door overwhelmed by the options. He looked up at Daniel, feeling equal parts eager and nervous. "So, um you lead the way. It's your mother."

"And your future mother-in-law," Ignacio piped up.

Grimacing, Daniel warned the demon, "Don't start. We'll have none of that. You're an assistant. Go assist Frances with making dinner reservations."

"I see what you're trying to do," Ignacio wagged his finger in the prince's face with a knowing smile gracing his lips. "You wish to be alone. I'll stay out of the way."

Shaking his head, Daniel didn't try to fight the demon and just let Ignacio walk away thinking he held the victory. "What are we going to do about him?" Daniel asked.

"I don't know. He doesn't seem like he's going to budge. Do you think we could ask for more time? Like tell him this curse can be the problem of our family in another five hundred years."

"No," Daniel stated, sounding so sure of himself. Blake couldn't even declare his favorite color with that much certainty. Daniel narrowed his brow, his shoulders rolled back in his princely fashion. "This is our problem. I'm not going to burden someone else with it. We'll find a way."

Sometimes, when Daniel made these daring declarations, Blake thought maybe the prince knew something about magic. It was like Daniel casted a spell and whatever he said was bound to come true.

Daniel motioned Blake and they started with the closest wall of ornaments. Blake tapped the nearest clear ball, making the fake snow and glitter jump up the sides and cover them. Together, they debated on price and elegance versus sentimental value.

That made Blake laugh. "If we wanted to be sentimental, we'd make the ornament ourselves." They walked through a short archway of all the kinds of Christmas lights a person could purchase from fat bulbs that twinkled to small lights that had a warmer glow.

Daniel made a face like he smelled something sour. "I don't like messing with glue. It gets all over and even after you wash your hands it stays. And don't get me started on glitter."

"I wouldn't dare," Blake teased, grinning so wide his cheeks began to ache, but there was something cold inside his chest, something that refused to be warmed by the moment. Blake thought maybe he gained a friend, an actual friend for the first time in life... but he had a feeling, after all of this was over, after they broke the curse and Blake could return home, him and Daniel would never be this close again.

"So..." Daniel began, sticking his hands in his pockets. They left the archway and found a spinning shelf that Daniel leisurely moved around as he glanced through the top shelf. "What would you be doing right now if you weren't here with me, shopping for an ornament in front of a horde of cameras."

Blake glanced around his shoulder to see a few paparazzi peeping through the store window, stealing as many pictures as they could, no matter the quality. This was a cue for Blake's face to flush a deeper color than ever before.

"What time is it?" Blake asked.

Daniel pulled back his sleeve, reading off his watch. "It's almost four."

"Then, I would've just started my next class.'"

"Your last class?"

"No, I'd have one more."

"And you'd walk alone?" Daniel nudged Blake as they moved forward. Blake swayed, matching Daniel's pace and ever-so-slightly nudging him back. "Or would you be escorted by one of your many suitors."

Blake laughed and elbowed Daniel, even though it made him stumbled. Daniel touched his back to steady him. The touch was confusing, nearly burning all of Blake's thoughts away. It was such a nice touch... but probably a nicer picture for the cameras.

"No way." Blake shook his head. "You know me. I've never been the center of attention before. The spotlight doesn't even know my

name. Damien always made sure of that and I wasn't at school long enough to even make friends."

"That's not true."

"Seriously, I was only there a few weeks—"

"No," Daniel stopped Blake, baffled to the point of amused. He had to explain this all to Blake as if it was old news. "I mean guys liked you. Remember your last winter here? We invited several families for Christmas, which included Gino Borghese. Do you remember him? He's the heir of the Italian coven."

"Everyone has such a title now. I just knew Gino, but what about him?"

"He had a crush on you."

"No way." Blake scoffed. He'd roll his eyes, but that probably wasn't very dignified.

"It's true. Surely, you remember when we were all hanging out in the den that Christmas. We were going to play poker and watch movies."

"I remember you telling me to go away."

"I was a brat, we're well aware of that now. Obviously, Gino was a bit more charming than I was. He told you to sit next to him and he'd teach you how to play."

"That... he was just being nice."

"I said Gino was charming. Not nice. It seemed like all weekend he wouldn't stop going on about your glorious transformation from the last time he saw you. I wasn't aware of it, yet."

"Yet?" Blake picked out that word like the golden needle in a haystack. "What do you mean by yet?"

"You're really going to make me say it?" Daniel looked down at his shoes a moment with his flustered sort of half smile. "No, I didn't

notice it when we were younger, but when I saw you again after all this time... It's gonna sound stupid, but you made me speechless."

Blake smiled, almost teary-eyed over such a compliment. He reached up, dragging his hand over the close shave against the side of Daniel's head. "I must've hit you with that pillow pretty hard, huh?"

"Wow," Frances said, and Blake retracted his hand so fast like Daniel's head caught fire. "You guys are really hamming it up for the cameras."

Blake glanced back at the window for only a second as heat crawled up his neck and pinched his ears. Turning around, he fingered through his curls and tried to appear casual, not like a thousand alarms and buzzers were going on inside his head. This must be a cold day in hell because Blake was fairly sure Frances just caught him flirting with Daniel Bellerose. That punk. That jerk. That-

"Oh, look! I think she might like this one," Daniel said, holding up a golden pair of turtle doves that were kissing as they perched on a reef. "She likes sweeter stuff like this, but what do you think?"

"You're asking me?"

"Yeah," He grinned. "We're in this together remember?"

Blake's mouth stayed open long enough for an entire beehive to fly inside. Snapping himself out of it, he said breathlessly, "Yes. I like that one."

"Here," he handed it to Blake, his cold fingers just brushing Blake's sensitive skin. "Go ahead and purchase this. I'm going to give Josephine a call."

Blake shook his head. "You can't help yourself, but fine."

"And grab some peppermint bark. They make their own."

"Okay," Blake said, trying to turn and head for the register when Daniel called him again.

"Oh! And get enough for everyone."

"I will. Go. I'm getting hungry."

With that, Daniel pulled out his phone and disappeared through a forest of fancy Christmas trees. Blake couldn't help but watch him walk away until he vanished. When Frances spoke, it surprised Blake who had completely forgotten he was even there. "I'm exhausted watching him."

Blake shrugged a little. "But he loves it. I think he likes serving a purpose."

Frances raised his brow, but didn't comment. He just raised his hands and joined Ignacio by a fake fire as he played with the settings. Frances took the controller from him and made the different lights flash to the beat of a Carly Ray Jepsen song. Blake went to the counter alone and met the owner of the shop, obviously a vampire from her perfect skin and unnaturally bright blue eyes. Her blonde hair was half up and down below her shoulders in soft curls. She wore a tight red sweater and pleaded skirt covered in candy canes.

"We're so pleased to have you in our shop, your highness," the owner curtsied a little.

Blake smiled. "The pleasure is mine. It's a beautiful shop. We don't have anything like this back where I'm from."

"Sagewick is a special place."

"I'm beginning to see that every minute I'm here. I've never been romanced by a city."

"And I hope you don't think this is too forward, but on behalf of the shop, we wanted to give you a little engagement present." The owner handed Blake a round circular cut of pine wood that was carved: Our First Christmas. She also carved their names and the date on the back.

"Thank you," Blake said, bringing the ornament close to his chest. "It's beautiful. I can't wait to show Danny, he'll love it—I mean,"

Blake caught himself. "Sorry. I mean, the Prince will..."

The owner cut him off and assured him, "Don't worry about it. Actually, it's nice to know the prince has a softer side. I would've never guessed, but I suppose I just had to see him around you."

Blake blushed and nodded a little. He thanked the owner again and paid for the treats and the gift for Adele. A little flutter of giddiness pounded in his chest as he looked over his shoulder, waiting impatiently for Daniel to return.

#

DANIEL

Rubbing his forehead with his palm, he tried to keep from exploding, to keep from letting his claws shoot out. "Josephine, I assumed you could handle making a few party arrangements, especially when the party planning was coming to completion."

Daniel opened his eyes, meeting the judgmental stare of a porcelain Santa statue. He turned the statue around. That might have been harsh, but sometimes he didn't have control over his venom. Maybe it was the fact he was pulled away from his conversation with Blake too soon. Maybe it was because he felt like a fool for telling Blake what he thought about him...

But it was so easy when he was dressed so nice, when his eyes sparkled the way they did and the way his soft lips pulled into a smile like that. Anyone would call a bonfire hot if they were stood right in front of one. It was easy to call a cat fluffy when it brushed your leg. Blake was undeniably handsome to anyone who could see.

"Don't get smart with me," Josephine snapped through the phone. He could hear the rustling of papers through the phone and cringed. Those were all his things being touched and moved and bothered and they would never find the right home again.

"I don't know what to tell you. It's in the top drawer. There's only two top drawers, so unless you have somehow fabricated another drawer in my absence, they wouldn't be anywhere else."

"Hey, I'd like to remind you I'm doing you a favor by taking over your responsibilities so you can flirt with your future hubby all day. I just need to know how many people are going to attend the charity ball. And I need the newest list of attendants, so we're all on the same page. I have found files and papers in your top drawers, but none of them have mentioned the new number. So, unless I am to learn that you and I speak and write very different languages, I can't find that number or that list."

Daniel sighed, the pressure of a headache building behind his left eye.

Josephine asked again, "You really wouldn't keep it anywhere else?"

"No-"

"Excuse me, your highness?"

Daniel turned around as Adrian approached. "Is everything alright? The car is ready."

"Yes, Adrian, my apologies," Daniel held his hand over the phone, even though Josephine kept talking. He explained, "My cousin is having trouble finding things that should be in plain sight. I'm trying to figure out how to find something without being able to see it myself." Daniel closed his eyes, annoyed by his own behavior. He kicked himself. "I shouldn't have just dropped all of this on her without giving her a proper tour or a proper plan. This is why I get called an ass."

"Does that mean you need to return to the castle? We've brought multiple cars, sir. Michael and the rest of your team can take you home and I'll escort the others to dinner."

"But..."

"It's not a problem. Besides, you've accomplished the main goal for today. The press will have enough pictures to satisfy their curiosities for now."

"That's true."

"There will be plenty of lunches in the future."

"Yes, you're right." Daniel took a deep breath and told Josephine, cutting her off in the middle of whatever she was going on about. "Jo- Josephine, hold tight. I'm coming back to the castle. I'll help you find that list and get you settled in."

"Thank you!" Josephine let out a huge sigh of relief. "I'll have the maids bring up something to drink, text me if you have a preference. I'm in the mood for a pitcher of B positive."

"Sounds great," Daniel said and hung up, "See you soon."

Adrian nodded. "I shall notify Michael about your departure and I'll explain everything to Blake."

"Thank you, Adrian." Daniel said and touched his shoulder, giving it a tight reassuring squeeze. He couldn't show his gratitude enough. "You've been a massive help. I don't know what we would've done without you."

"You're too kind, sir."

Adrian bowed ever-so-slightly before disappearing. Daniel immediately immersed himself with the charity ball, pulling up his calendar and all the important contact that Josephine would need. He was already sat in the back of the car and on the way home before he even looked up to notice the snow falling. Then, it hit him. "Damn."

"Darn," Michael corrected him.

"I forgot that Blake bought some of that peppermint bark"

"I'm sure Blake will give you some, if you be nice."

"I'm nice."

"Yes," Michael's lips quirked. "You're very nice to Blake, sir."

#

Instead of who he expected, Adrian climbed into he back of the car and sat beside Blake. It had been so long since they sat together that something felt off inside of Blake's stomach. His palms immediately started to sweat again. "Where's Danny?"

"He returned to the castle," Adrian explained with a small smile. "It seems he felt as if things had been wrapped up here so he could go home and attend to his more important matters."

"Oh." Blake's chest tightened. He looked down and he noticed how white his knuckles were as he squeezed the little wooden ornament. "Is that what he said?"

"Would I ever lie to you?"

"No."

Putting the ornament away, he caught Ignacio's eyes. The demon smiled a little. He could probably read the disappoint written across Blake's face in neon letters.

"What's wrong?" Adrian asked. "Come here."

Adrian put his arm around Blake and pulled him in, letting Blake rest against his chest. It brought Blake back to when he was young and Adrian was always there to wipe his tears away, to comfort his worst worries. Adrian was Blake's oldest, most worn out security blanket. But it had been a long time since Adrian did this...

He must look awful.

"I just feel like such an idiot, I don't know. It's just like being back home. I can't catch a break and I can't read the signs. I'm so oblivious."

"You're not stupid," Adrian told him, a sternness to his voice. "You and I see a very different man in the mirror. One day..." His voice softened as Adrian used his free hand to move the curls out of Blake's eyes. "I hope you can see the handsome, smart and let's call it optimistic man that I do..." Blake looked from Adrian's chest, held

in place by Adrian's sturdy arm. They locked eyes and Blake held his breath, surprised by the heat lurking in Adrian's dark eyes. "And if Daniel misses it, then that's his loss, but me? I will always be here. Always."

Blake didn't have a response. He simply nodded and let himself be held a little while longer. Just by chance, he glanced up and noticed Ignacio glaring at Adrian.

"What is it?" Adrian asked, having noticed too. Ignacio wasn't trying to hide it.

"Nothing," Ignacio whispered. "You just remind me... never mind."

Ignacio turned around without another word. He just looked outside the window and watched the snow begin to fall.

Alone together in the backseat, Adrian relaxed and Blake's body felt heavy with exhaustion. He slipped all the way down to rest his head on top of Adrian's lap. He decided to close his eyes and maybe take a nap, but with Adrian playing his hair, he couldn't. The touch multiplied Blake's senses as he became hyper aware of his presence. This wasn't a new position but... the way Adrian touched him was different. The way he looked at Blake. The way Adrian's knuckle dragged across Blake's neck when he assumed Blake was asleep forced Blake to questions Adrian's intentions.

But it was Adrian.

Adrian.

Adrian was his oldest friend, his protector. Blake felt ashamed for even questioning him a single second. He had to ignore it. Not that he'd ever bring it up. Blake would be mortified if he accused Adrian of anything and got it wrong. Plus, if he offended Adrian and forced him to return home, Blake would be more alone than ever.

Blake continued to pretend to sleep until Adrian jostled him awake when they arrived at the restaurant.

#

Author's Note

I feel like I'm doing that thing I do in most books where the chapters are just getting longer and longer and I can't stop myself. Lol. Next chapter will be short tho! Because it's another dream sequence and those puppies are short, so expect that soon ~ Overall, I had a lot of fun writing this chapter. I miss Christmas. It's my favorite holiday, what about you guys?

Please let me know what you think below! Do you think Blake is reading the signals wrong? What do you think about Adrian's behavior? Are you into it? Not into it? Let me know!

17. Blake

BLAKE

I opened my eyes, even though the last thing I remembered was closing them. I stood by the wall like a piece of the furniture with a plant in my face. Swiping it away, I stumbled onto the floor, surrounded by spools of fabric, hundreds of yards of it stacked by the wall. I got out of the way of the men bustling about as they sewed fabric and constructed huge crinoline cages and the boning for corsets.

The front door opened, and I moaned, "Oh, no."

Henry walked through the door, taking off his leather gloves. Like last time, he wore mostly reds and golds, but this time it was all covered up by a thick black cloak. He walked to a table, covered with all kinds of gloves and neckties. A man on top of a raised platform waved to him, "Ah! Henry, glad to see you. Hope you're doing well."

"Very well, thank you. How's your daughter? I heard Elizabeth had a boy, is that right?" Henry asked, everything about him being so soft and gentle. Even the way he carried his gloves appeared to be of the lightest touch. His voice wasn't any louder than it needed to be either

As they carried on their conversation, I followed behind Henry. I examined his face, his hair and even the way he walked. "Somehow," I spoke to myself, "we're related. You're my great, great, great—I honestly don't know how many times great grandfather, I guess? Maybe? I don't know... but we don't look anything alike. Other than curly hair and yet..." I shook my head. "You don't seem like you're a wizard. You seem so human, which doesn't make sense. The Winslows have always been witches."

Henry thanked the man again for his well wishes and wandered to a display of hats. The door opened again, and Henry straightened up, fixing his posture. He pretended to be aloof, but the corners of his lips trembled as a smile attempt to wiggle into the light. I rolled my eyes.

It was Nicholas again.

He strolled inside, instantly spotting Henry and smiling. He acted all coy and browsed the other side of the shop, until they just happened to meet in the middle. Now, I followed Nicholas. "And I guess you're related to Danny. You, I get it." Faintly, Nicholas looked so much like Eitienne. Or I guess, Eitienne looked like him, which meant Danny did too.

"And you're definitely not a vampire," I told Nicholas as if he could hear me and I wanted to be proved wrong. In this time period, vampires didn't have the luxury of enchanted items or potions that would shield them from burning up in the sun. A vampire walking the sunny streets of London in the 16th century was suicidal. "There's something I'm missing here."

Frustrated, I hopped up on the table and held my cheeks, watching the two dorks dance around each other in the shop. Henry would brush by Nicholas with a faint little smile. Nicholas would lean around Henry on purpose just to grab something random. I rolled my eyes. Knowing that they were our ancestors, it was kind of like watching my grandparents be disastrous flirts.

"Nicholas!" The man from before greeted Nicholas. "How's the new songs goin?"

"I'm about to hit a breakthrough, I think. If I can just find my muse again."

"Good luck with that, Nick."

"Then, there's Edward," I said, continuing to open more doors than close them. "How does he fit into all of this? And where's Iggy? Why am I having these dreams? Are they trying to tell me something? Henry? Are you trying to tell me something?"

Eventually, Henry ended up examining the table I was sitting on and Nicholas joined him. "Excuse me, my good sir," Nicholas nudged Henry, but Henry continued to compare one handkerchief to another as if they were more interesting than the tall, dark and handsome man beside him. "Have you visited this shop prior to today?"

"Yes, I'm quite fond of it and its people."

"They do good work here?"

"The very best."

"My, good work and a visually pleasing clientele. I'm an occupant for life."

Henry cracked first, laughing behind his hand. I sighed. Yeah. Definitely couldn't see how we were related. Comparably, he was the prince and I was the pauper.

"Will I see you tonight at the ball?" Nicholas asked in hushed tones.

"Yes. Edward won't be home until tomorrow. Would you play me something?" Henry placed his hand against Nicholas' pinky.

"I'd only take requests from you... it's good to see you." I've never seen someone so happy and yet, so unbelievably sad. "Can I steal you away for little while?"

"No, but you can join me on my other errands. There's a book the butcher, Thatcher found for me."

"I heard what you said, but I don't understand it. Why is a butcher giving you a book?"

"Because I mentioned that I was looking for it and he said he'd get it done."

"Didn't the candlestick maker's wife bring you muffins to the house as well? How do you get these people to do strange things for you?"

"You make it sound so nefarious. People are more than their occupation, Nicholas. If I was just as narrow minded about you as you are about others, I'd think all your hands were good for were plucking a lute."

"Pray tell Henry Winslow, what are these hands also good for?"

I covered my face, unable to watch this for another moment. Sitting here was the biggest mistake of my life. My dream life. Peeking through my

fingers, I was surprised to find Henry and Nicholas nowhere in sight. The clothing shop was gone, and the sun had said goodnight. Looking around, I was perched by a blazing fire in a room as grand as the Bellerose castle.

As my eyes adjusted, I jumped to find Ignacio lying across the couch, staring blankly at the fire. It wasn't just that he looked bored, he appeared to be lifeless. He was dressed down with a loose cotton shirt, but still wore tight pants and boots.

Examining him, I took a shot in the dark, "Can you hear me?"

Ignacio didn't respond.

"Ah! Ignacio!"

Barreling into the room, Henry made Ignacio jump and scramble to sit up. "Henry? How did the market treat you?"

"Very well. Actually," Henry grinned nervously and took the other side of the couch. "I bought you something. Not knowing much about you, I had to make a guess of what you'd like, but I think you're the type to like this sort of thing..."

"I'm almost nervous. What impression have I given you?"

"Here," Henry pulled a book from bag and handed it to the demon.

Ignacio raised it as if he never seen a book before. "A book of sonnets?" He blinked at the binding, opening it and letting the pages fly by. Maybe he thought it was a prank, that maybe nothing would be inside. "I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything. I hope you like it."

He laid the book on his lap, but didn't let it go. His grip tightened. "I'm not... It's impossible for me to simply take things without giving something in return. What would you like?"

"Nothing. I'm serious."

"As am I... Edward told you I'm not normal, correct?"

"Yes."

"He's right. When I say I can't just take it, I mean it."

"Okay..." Henry nodded. He thought upon the matter for a few moments, before coming up with an idea. He smiled, placing his hand on Ignacio's arm. Ignacio looked down at the gesture as if his arm was going to suddenly break off. "How about you choose your favorite sonnet and then, read it to me."

Ignacio's brow narrowed. "That doesn't sound like a fair trade at all."

Shyly, Henry bowed his head. "I was not given the luxury of learning how to read myself." He looked up, his smile returning. "But I do love to listen. So, it would be nice. Truly."

Someone chuckled and it wasn't anyone by the fire. I jumped alongside Henry, snapping a surprised look at a man by one of the doors. He walked out of the shadows with his arms crossed as he held a crystal glass of some dark liquid. He was a tall man, taller than average in this time period with a light brown beard and tussled hair.

Henry tensed up recoiling from Ignacio, but it was too late. The man's eyes were pinned on Henry's face as he took a swig of his drink. A horrible snicker trickled out of his mouth, making my stomach twist and tighten. "You certainly move fast, don't you? I'm gone for a week and you're cozying up to the help?"

"Edward?" Henry found his voice, trying to keep it light and nonchalant, but I could tell, even he knew there wasn't any point trying. He did anyways with a smile. "You're back early."

"Sorry to disappoint you. Obviously, I've broken up the fun."

"No, no, not at all, my darling" Henry stood, eyeing Ignacio for a moment as he swept across the room. "I was just—"

"I know what you were doing. You're not smart enough to be sly about it."

Henry didn't wither. He just held onto that sunny smile for dear life and got out of his seat. I'd never be able to do it. Even now I was cemented to

this chair, bogged down by the tension crowding the room. Henry even walked right up the man that to me, looked sharp to the touch as if he was covered in thorns and if Henry touched him in any of the wrong places, he'd be pricked.

"Let's not fight. You're home again and that's wonderful news." Henry slid his hands up Edward's arm, bringing himself up to reach Edward's lips. They kissed and I could hardly watch. It made me sick to my stomach, while Ignacio just stared forward. He didn't move. Didn't breathe. Just watched the fire dance with empty black eyes.

Edward's thumb caressed Henry's cheek before sliding his hand down Henry's neck. That thumb circled his chin and in the next instant, his hand was around Henry's throat.

I jumped to my feet and yet, still frozen in place.

"Edward!" Henry croaked, snatching Edward's wrist, but he didn't have the strength to pry him off. Edward just squeezed harder and my own throat closed. Touching my neck, I couldn't feel Edward's hands there, but something was crushing my windpipe, and I choked.

"Iggy," I snapped through gasps of air. "Do something!"

"Henry," Edward spoke calmly, his voice so deep we were drowning in it. "You're a descent liar. I'm not quite convinced."

Unable to argue, Henry struggled with Edward's arm, pulling and yanking. It didn't seem natural the way Edward's arm didn't budge. Not even a little. All the blood rushed to my head and I gasped, collapsing to my knees.

"It's time we went to bed, don't you agree?"

A tear leaked out from the corner of my eye as the panicked gripped me. My heart raced, screaming at me for relief. I needed to breathe. I needed one little sliver of air or I was going to pass out.

Edward slammed Henry into the nearest wall and the pain exploding in the back of my head knocked me sideways. I dropped at Ignacio's feet, seeing only the stars.

#

Author's Note

Another dream! And not the last either ;) We've finally gotten an introduction to Edward. My apologies. Lol. And a little glimpse of Iggy from the past. How do they compare? And not to worry. Our regularly scheduled fun will be back in the next chapter~

Thank you again for 1k subscribers. I really appreciate it. Don't forget to like the chapter and tell me what you think!

18. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Gasping for air, Blake snapped upright in bed, flinging off his bed sheets. He half coughed, half screamed and fought for gulps of breaths. Kicking the rest of the sheets off, Blake ran to the nearest window. He threw the doors open and a swirl of cold air and flecks of snow rushed inside. Blake gripped the edge, bracing himself so he wouldn't fall through the world.

It felt like ages before his heart settled. He thought maybe he'd spend the rest of his life wracked with these nerves. That this panic would never go away. Taking another deep breath, Blake finally detached from the window and pulled the curtains closed. He rested against the velvet fabric.

"It was just a dream. It was just a dream," Blake told himself, kidding himself. He could still feel Edward's hand around his throat and squeeze. Nervously, Blake went to the bathroom and check his neck in the mirror, turning around all the way to search for bruising or any mark at all.

Nothing. It was a dream.

"I'm losing it," Blake whispered.

Shaking his head, he walked back into the bedroom, but hit the door fumbling backwards. He forgot about Ignacio. Instead of doing his normal disappearing trick, tonight Ignacio slept on Blake's couch, wrapped in blankets with little clothing on. While asleep, he couldn't conceal his red skin, his tail, or the horns.

Like this, curled up like a cat and hugging a decorative pillow, Ignacio could've been a completely different demon than the one in Blake's dream... which was fine. Since it was just a dream. All at once, Blake had the overwhelming feeling that he didn't want to be alone. He grabbed the white robe Adele had given him when he

arrived and took one step outside when he realized he didn't know where he was going. He wasn't sure who he was running off to find.

Daniel was probably in his office, but no one ever told Blake where that was in the castle. As quietly as possible, Blake tip-toed back into his room. He crept around a snoring Ignacio to grab a pillow and a pair of scissors.

With his stash, he walked back into the hallway and whispered, "I don't know which Bellerose picked out the pillows, but I hope they don't mind what I'm going to do next... and if they would mind, I hope they're not invited to the wedding."

Blake cut through the belly of the pillow, uncovering its goose feather stuffing. "Help me find Danny," Blake asked the feathers, calling upon his own magic. All the anxiety riddling his body, the feeling of flies beating down the window of his body calmed and faded, replaced by a warm sensation. A handful of feathers trickled out of the pillow, somersaulting into the air. Blake grinned.

One by one, the feathers flew out of the pillow and made a trail. Blake ran after the feathers, sprinting through the hallways of the palace, lit only by the moonlight. Every light in the castle was off, so he could see the sliver of golden light from a mile away. It came from a small crack underneath a great oak door. Blake could hear the faint hum of music. The feathers lost their life before they hit the door, scattering across the checkered marble.

Suddenly nervous, Blake glanced down at his Star Wars pajama bottoms and his old college T-shirt and felt his face warm. He closed the robe and tied it shut. Maybe he should've let Michael pick out some sleepwear too. He curled his toes on the cold floor.

Blake supposed it wasn't the stupidest he ever looked in front of Daniel...

Still, looking ridiculous felt like a better option than being alone. He knocked on the door, expecting "a go away" as if the teen Daniel was going to pop out.

Instead, Daniel said, "come in" from the other side.

Taking one more deep breath for strength, Blake crept inside to find a much longer room than he expected. That was when the realization hit him and his face warmed. There was a chance those feathers would lead him to Daniel's bedroom in the middle of the night too... thank God it was Daniel's study.

It had a vaulted ceiling that stretched farther than Blake expected. Before he could even make it to Daniel's desk, he'd half to pass an entire table, a lounge area with gold and white couches that didn't look like they were made for sitting. There were fireplaces on either side of the with a line of hanging lights between them. All of this encased by two long walls of books and built-in china cabinets. It looked magazine ready.

Daniel did too.

He still wore the same clothes from earlier in the day. Mostly. He just wore his white button up with the top few buttons snapped opened. With his sleeves rolled up, Blake was given the rare opportunity to see the shape of Daniel's muscular arms. His body shivered remembering how easily Daniel picked him up that night in the city.

"Hey," Daniel perked up a little, asking Blake in a dreamy tone. "What on earth are you still doing up?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Blake smiled, but didn't have the emotional energy to tease Daniel for long. "Actually, I..." he almost admitted to having a nightmare but flushed with embarrassment and changed his mind. Thinking about it sounded too childish. Instead, he said, "I just couldn't sleep, I guess."

Daniel sat the paper in his hands down and smiled. "Why are you being timid over there? Come here."

"Sorry, I just realized I must be interrupting your work—"

"No, no. Come in. I could use the company." He stretched his muscles and Blake could hear their tired wail from here. "There are dozens of people living in this castle, and yet when I'm the last one awake at night, it gets lonely."

"If you're sure?" Blake took a hesitant step inside.

"Positive." Daniel smile and Blake couldn't help smiling back. He walked through the study. He walked around Daniel's desk, resting against his chair.

"I've never heard that song before," Blake motioned to the opened Spotify window on Daniel's screen.

Daniel nodded. "I'm always listening to something. It helps me focus."

"What music do you like the most?"

"Hmm..." Daniel hummed, thinking his answer over. He leaned back in his chair and it almost felt like he was leaning into Blake.

"That's kind of an impossible question for me. Music is the soundtrack to life. Different sounds, different songs suit different situations..." Daniel said, but his voice sounded strange. Blake looked again and his heart jumped up his throat. It wasn't Daniel anymore, it was Nicholas. Nicholas dressed up like Daniel, smiling and gushing. It made Blake's heart race. "If I'm feeling upset, I'm not going to listen to the same song I'd play if I was angry. Music is its own form of magic that can change the mood and sometimes, even help people fall in love."

He leaned closer and Blake rubbed his eyes, taking a deep breath and trying to calm down. Blake muttered, "I think I'm still dreaming."

When Blake opened his eyes, he found Daniel there again and a wave of relief almost washed him away. His body deflated and he thought he might pass out then and there. Daniel leaned closer. "Is there something wrong?"

Blake just shook his head, which wasn't enough for Daniel apparently. He cupped Blake's cheek, freezing him in place. It was difficult to lie to Daniel when his face was this close, when his eyes were looking right through Blake as if searching his soul. Blake admitted, "I've been having weird dreams lately. This time it was a

nightmare about my ancestor, Henry."

"You know his name?"

"Yeah, Iggy confirmed it." Blake touched Daniel's hand, keeping it there. He liked the coolness of his touch and the gentle way Daniel caressed his thumb across Blake's cheek. It made Blake's knees go pillow soft. "I've never had dreams like them before. They're... they're making me nervous."

Daniel's brow narrowed. "Don't worry. I think I've come up with a way to end all of this."

"Really?"

"Yes. I think we make a new deal with Ignacio. He wants to become human? Okay, then let's make a new deal that will simulate that feeling."

"How?"

"I'm not sure, yet. We'll brainstorm tomorrow. You need sleep. Real sleep." Daniel let his hands drop and Blake squirmed with this awkward feeling of disappointment. He didn't know why he had to be so dramatic. That wasn't a kiss. It wasn't even a hug. Daniel just barely touched him, and his heart was beating way too fast, fast enough to warrant a doctor.

"Why don't you grab a book or something? The most boring one you can find, and you can rest on the couch."

"Are you sure? I don't want to bother you. I know what you're doing is important."

"Not more important than you. Technically, I'm finishing up this work for Josephine so I can spend time with you. As long as Ignacio keeps the deal intact, then the wedding is still on, so that means we still have to plan it. Plus, I'm not done with you yet, Blake Winslow. Even if we don't get married, I'm going to help you become a prince."

"Even if I'm not royalty?"

"Anybody can be a prince. Whether you're the prince of the kitchen, prince of mismatched socks or just the little Winslow prince, you can be one."

Looking down, Blake tried hiding his goofy smile and hurried to the nearest bookshelf. Daniel said to grab something boring, but most of the books were about the history of Sagewick, which actually interested Blake a great deal. He just nabbed something random and hopped on the couch, landing on his back with a bounce. It wasn't particularly comfortable, but he liked being able to watch Daniel work over the pages of the book.

"Did you ever want to make music?" Blake asked after a while.

Daniel shook his head, immersed in his work. "No. I always knew I was going to rule this coven. I'm so suited for it, I almost believe in destiny."

Blake grinned. He almost called Daniel out for being cheesy, but that might keep him from continuing it. Blake didn't want that. He reopened his book as if he was now officially going to start reading and adjusted his position again. Fat chance.

"What about you? What do you want to do?" Daniel asked.

"Um... I'm not sure. Of course, I want to help my family in any way I can, but what I really want, more than anything is to see the world. I want to break free and travel. I've always been stuck inside one place or another. I'd like for a while... if that wasn't the case."

#

DANIEL

And if they couldn't break this deal, Blake would just be stuck again. Daniel's home, his castle was beautiful, but a cage was still a cage, no matter beautiful the bars might be.

A knot formed in Daniel's chest, tightening when Blake returned to his book with a small sad smile. Daniel could always tell what Blake was thinking. The guy couldn't bluff to save his life. It must be difficult living with his heart on his sleeve. Such a dangerous

position. It's so easy to crush.

Daniel didn't have anything to say because he refused to make a promise, he might not be able to keep and he didn't want to give him a temporary comfort like a flimsy Band-Aid. Settling back into work, he finished his list of tasks and Josephine wouldn't need anything else to complete work on the charity gala. Then, the day of the event, she'd be on her own. He hoped her club, the Verona wouldn't suffer on his account.

Sighing, Daniel rubbed his tired eyes. They itched with exhaustion. If he closed his eyes and laid his head down, he'd be lured into sleeping. Taking a sharp breath, he leaned back in his chair and checked his watch: 3:45 am.

Last time he managed that he was in college.

Glancing up, he noticed Blake half spilling off the couch, his book laid open on the floor. Daniel stood, carefully walking up to the wizard. With Blake laid out in front of him like this, it was hard controlling his lustful thoughts. Somehow, every time Daniel looked at Blake, he becomes more attractive. And with his lips lightly opened, he looked downright kissable.

Blake's brow pinched together, and he rustled, turning onto his back. This couch wasn't bought to be slept on. Like most of the furniture, it was displayed for looks. Sometimes Daniel felt that way about himself. He bent down, using his thumb to flatten the wrinkle between Blake's brow, until his porcelain skin was smooth again, and Daniel brushed his curls away. Still asleep, Blake nuzzled towards Daniel's hand and Daniel jumped, pulling his hand away from the shock.

His whole life, Daniel learned how to make people happy and comfortable. He'd find someone a better job, find them a better position in the coven, force opportunities into people's laps and sometimes he'd do things as simple as buy them what they desired the most. Daniel himself had never been the direct source of comfort to anyone. Except now. Blake didn't come asking for something from the kitchen or for a new bedroom or anything. Blake asked for Daniel.

A shuddering breath left Daniel's lips.

"Blake," Daniel whispered, gently stroking his cheek. "I hope you don't mind, but I'm going to pick you up. I don't want to wake you, not when you worked so hard to fall back asleep..."

Hearing no protest, Daniel slipped his arms underneath Blake and scooped him off the couch, pulling him in close. Blake fit inside his arms easily as if Daniel had held him a thousand times before and his arms could remember Blake's shape.

He left his office, taking a stroll to his room. Under his breath, he muttered, "Somewhere, Ignacio is yucking it up."

As if summoning him again, Daniel found Ignacio on the exact couch Daniel had planned to sleep. Sighing, Daniel laid Blake on his bed. He leaned Blake forward, slipping off the robe on top of his pajamas. Daniel shook his head, keeping his laughter down when he noticed the Star Wars theme. Blake groaned and Daniel tried to pull back, but Blake grabbed his arm. Blake turned with Daniel's arm like he was supposed to be the blanket.

"Blake, that's my arm," Daniel whispered, grinning ear to ear.

Blake just grumbled some nonsense and held on tighter. Giving up, Daniel pushed Blake a little towards the middle of the bed and crawled in behind him. This close, Daniel could smell his shampoo and the smell of freshly washed cotton.

"Blake," Daniel whispered again.

Hushing him, Blake just nuzzled his face into the pillow.

"If we weren't engaged because of a five hundred year old curse..." Daniel whispered, using his free hand to stroke Blake's hair. "I might have asked you out." He chuckled over his own little joke and settled against the mattress. This wouldn't be the first time they slept together. Not the first time in this bed either, or with a demon only a few feet away. Daniel smiled wider and shook his head.

Blake Winslow has certainly made Daniel's life much more interesting.

#

Author's Note

After all the recent dramatic moments, it's nice to have some good old fashion fluff ~ Y'all aren't even ready for who's POV starts the next chapter. I'll give you a hint, his name rhymes with Rances (lol). Seriously, I could feel myself blushing in this chapter.

See you guys next time! <3 Miss Bonnett

19. Frances/Blake

FRANCES

Frances smiled at a passing maid, keeping his wicked hands behind his back as if there was absolutely nothing going on. He'd spent most of his life pretending he wasn't getting into trouble, so putting on an innocent smile was as easy as flicking on a light switch.

The young maid raised a brow at him, a little ember of curiosity burning in her eyes. They'd probably be good friends if his reputation didn't always get in the way. With a smirk, Frances winked, and the maid gushed, quickening her pace to leave the hall. The sound of her shoes hitting the marble floors bounced all around the gigantic entry way.

"Still got it," Frances muttered.

Alone again, Frances bent down and tried stealing a peek of the bottom of Etienne's mother's portrait. He forgot the former Queen's name. From the look of her sour face, it was probably something equally stuffy like Agnes or Gertrude.

"What are you doing?" A raspy voice tickled Frances' neck hair. He grinned, turning to look up at Blake's assistant, Ignacio. He was everything Frances wanted in Blake's assistant: good looking, a sexy accent, tight pants, and little regard of what an assistant actually did all day.

"Do you really want to know?" Frances asked, leaning closer towards Ignacio as if he was sharing an important secret.

Ignacio's smile wasn't easily swayed. "Don't you want to tell me?"

"You couldn't be more right." Frances stood up straight with his hands raised. He was barely any taller than Ignacio. Maybe in a different pair of shoes, Ignacio was taller. Closer, the assistant smelled sweet like rose water. "I'm searching for secret

passageways. Old palace like this one..." He looked up at the art deco ceiling and the tall candelabras that actually held a flame. "You know there's bound to be one."

"Yes," Ignacio nodded and crossed his arms, considering the room. "But they wouldn't place such valuable escape routes here, out in the open where anyone can find them. Passageways would be in the master's study or bedroom, somewhere no one without permission could go."

"I..." Frances quirked his head. He didn't expect this response. "I didn't think about that."

"Do you think the King is home? Should we go snoop? There are no beheadings in Sagewick, anymore yes? We should be fine."

"You're not going to tell me to quit it or to stop being a menace?"

"What? Are you scared of the repercussions? I'm disappointed in you, Frances."

Frances was compelled to match Ignacio's amused look. They grinned like two kids threatening to rob their mothers of all the treats in the cookie jar. Frances' fingers itched to take Ignacio's hand and race down the hallway, not knowing if the king and queen were gone or not. He simply wanted to get Ignacio alone. And the sooner the better, honestly.

"Frances!" Blake called as he descended the grand staircase. His black curls bounced as he hit every step. Sporting his new clothes, Blake wore a gray sweater with elbow patches over a simple white button up, all packaged underneath his wool coat. He wore a nice pair of jeans and shiny brown leather shoes. Frances did notice a pair of mismatched polka dot socks and his cold heart fluttered. They haven't taken the boy out of him yet.

"Hey," Frances nodded his head. "If it isn't my third favorite witch?"

Meeting them at the bottom, Blake's face dropped. "What? That's rude."

"I mean, what have you done for me lately?" Frances slipped his

hands into his pockets and nuzzled his nose at Blake.

Blake winced. He spun his engagement ring around his pale finger. Frances had caught him doing it a lot lately, especially when he was alone and nervous. Blake never did it when Daniel was around though. Frances didn't mention the cute quirk. He liked watching the pair flounder with their unavoidable feelings. He just waited for them to drown.

"Actually, I need a favor."

"Now he needs a favor." Frances turned on his heel with ease, walking towards the lounge right by the front door. Unwanted visitors were usually politely asked to wait there until someone with authority could come and tell them to fuck off. Frances knew those rooms well.

"Come on, Frances," Blake pleaded, which made Frances' mischievous side grin with amusement. Times like this he missed his brother Collin and his sister-in-law, Abigale. They were just as fun to tease as this new couple. But he knew their buttons better.

"Frances," Ignacio spoke up and Frances stretched like a cat basking in the sun. Ignacio's voice reminded him of honey slowly sliding off the spoon. "You could at least hear Blake out. I'm sure whatever he needs is reasonable."

"But what if what I want in return isn't reasonable?" Frances posed and wagged his finger at Ignacio. "I could ask for anything, like the first bite of his food for all eternity."

"Eternity is a long time, Frances. A man like you would become bored of eternity."

Frances stopped, his eyes lingering inside the warm pool of Ignacio's brown eyes.

Yes, Frances thought. He was absolutely going to take this man to bed.

"Frances!" Blake chimed. He slapped his hands together in prayer, begging Frances, "Please, I don't need much. I was just hoping to get

the number of that Oracle who came to the press conference. I need some advice."

"Advice from a matchmaker? But you're already engaged."

"It's not about that. It's magic related."

"Oh, well sure. I mean, I need to ask her first but—" Just as he was speaking, Frances' felt his pocket buzz. Frances took out his phone and Delphine's picture flashed across the screen. It was a picture of the two of them posing for a selfie at a mutual friend's wedding. Their second wedding technically.

Frances answered, "That's spooky, Delphine."

"Frances! My darling! I was minding my own business—"

"Sure, you were."

"When I received the oddest sensation. It was a tingle from the back of my neck to my toes. The most curious thing! Usually, you'd have to pay for something like that."

Frances snorted. "It's my friend, Blake Winslow. Do you remember him? He wanted your number."

"Of course, I remember him! One never forgets a prince. Give him the phone, but not without giving me a kiss through the receiver. I miss you terribly, darling. The city aches for you to come home."

"I'll be home after New Year's..." Frances promised and caught Ignacio's eyes, catching a small flicker of disappointment. He masked it well with a small smile. Someone was also a good liar. Maybe even better than him.

Frances tossed Blake his phone without warning, forcing Blake to fumble around with it. "Here you go. Have fun with her and try not to get adopted."

#

BLAKE

Blake was late waking up this morning.

Honestly, he might have slept longer. It had been the best night's sleep he had since he arrived in Sagewick... Blake stirred that morning with something in his arms. It was Daniel's arm. They slept together again! He couldn't believe it. Damien would be furious.

But Blake managed to get out of bed without waking the vampire and got in the shower. By the time he returned, Daniel was gone too. He was relieved... not that Daniel left, but that Daniel didn't see him in a towel.

"I'm sorry to bother you," Blake told Delphine Kelley on the other line. He walked back to the stairs, sitting on one of the last few steps. He felt tiny inside the grand foyer that forced him to bend his neck all the way back if he wanted to admire the painted ceiling.

"Not at all!" She gushed, her voice bright and fluttering like the wings of a hummingbird. "I'm always free for a chat. How was my cure for hangovers?"

"Effective. Mrs. Kelley, why didn't you tell me what was going to happen that night?"

"I wouldn't dream of it. No spoilers, darling! It's against my code of conduct!"

"But you..." Blake glanced around to see if anyone was close enough to hear him admit, "... saw us summon a demon. And you didn't want to warn me?"

"What's a little demon summoning between fiancés? My darling, it is not my job to interfere with fate. The future... is finicky. Maybe, you and Prince Daniel summon a demon. Maybe not. Things like women's hair, the weather and my favorite color, like the future, changes often."

Blake let out a long sigh. "Mrs. Kelley—"

"Delphine! My friends call me Delphine, can't we be friends? Nothing wrong with making new friends, even across oceans."

"Of course. Delphine, I was wondering if I could ask you about your visions."

"Fire away!"

"Okay. Um," Blake gripped the phone tighter. He needed to just rip the Band-Aid off and ask. "Do you ever receive your visions while you're asleep?"

"Sometimes I do and sometimes, what I think is a vision of the future is actually just a dream. It doesn't happen often though, my love. Not since I was young and didn't have enough control of my third eye... why are you asking?"

"It's probably nothing."

"Probably doesn't tell me to call. Whatever you're worried about is safe with me. I shall put your little secret in a life-jacket before we set sail on this discussion."

"Okay." Blake closed his eyes, bracing himself. If his suspicions weren't true, he was going to come across like an idiot, but what else is new? He explained, "For the past few nights, I've been having these dreams of my ancestor and his life, I think before he made a deal with Ignacio, the demon we summoned. It just started out of the blue and I don't know what to make of them."

Delphine hummed, thinking for a moment, before speaking, "So, you're wondering if you're an undiscovered Oracle like myself?"

"No, no. I'm just trying to figure out if what I'm seeing is really the past."

"It's difficult to say. You said they appeared out of the blue? Would they have happened to start when you summoned that demon friend of yours?"

Now that Blake thought about it, she was right. "Yeah, actually."

"It seems like a lot of magic was thrown around. Are you swayed one way? Do you think you're getting a peek into the past?"

"Honestly? I think I am."

"Then, you must trust your magic. It sounds like your ancestor wants you to see something, maybe even warn you. Just go along with the dreams and find out. No harm in that."

"But... the dreams, they're taking a dark turn. I don't know if I can handle them. They feel so real Delphine, like I'm actually there and sometimes, I can literally feel my ancestor, Henry's emotions."

"I didn't say it was easy."

With a sigh, Blake closed his eyes and tried to relax. He thought the same thing, but he had kind of hoped Delphine would disagree with him or call him crazy. The last thing he wanted from this conversation was to be agreed with.

Delphine spoke up with a bit more cheer. "Now let's get to business, my darling. For my services, the only thing I require is an invitation to the wedding and a plus one."

Blake grinned. "You can have a plus two."

"Oh! I'll take it. Stay positive, Blake Winslow. I have a feeling everything will work out."

"Really? Did you see it in a vision?"

"No! But I'm rarely wrong, so I thought I'd just put it out into the universe."

Shaking his head, Blake said, "Alright. Thank you, Delphine."

"It's my absolute pleasure. I've been needing some fun around here. Everyone is far too domesticated. And my darling, if you would do me an important favor and watch out for Frances for me."

"I will, but I'm pretty sure Frances can watch out for himself."

"That's his problem. He's convinced himself that he will be a singular being forever that he often walks away from his chance at finding happiness. He's made himself into one big joke, but I'd like

more people to take him seriously. He's still a man with a heart, I swear on my life."

"I believe you."

They said their goodbyes and Blake hung up. By Delphine's request, he added her number onto his phone and sent her another little thank you text. She immediately texted back with requests of copious pictures, a couple selfie and if Blake knows any single people that would like to be matched up to send them her way.

Blake laughed and only promised he'd do his best.

"What are you doing?" Daniel appeared, slipping his fingers through Blake's hair. Blake turned, but Daniel didn't lift his hand. He just stroked Blake's hair more, making Blake blush. Daniel was coming down the stairs, freshly showered and dressed for the day. He looked stunning without even trying.

Blake sputtered. "J-just taking a phone call."

"Oh, okay. You've got some..." Daniel motioned to the corner of his mouth. "Toothpaste still there."

"Do I really?" Blake rubbed his palm across his lips and cheeks as his entire body was encased in a blush. He dressed for Sagewick winter, but right now it felt like the summer in Hell. "This keeps happening to me. You know, yesterday I had spinach in my teeth all day and nobody told me. I bet a booger could be flopping out of my nose and no one would tell me. I'd tell you. I'm so nice, I'd fix your tag if it was sticking out, but nobody helps me—"

He watched Daniel's lips curl, his eyes sparkling with a mischievous flint that Blake knew all too well. He'd been tricked.

"Danny!" Blake snapped, realizing he'd been tricked. He shot his hand out to smack some of the stupidity out of the prince, but Daniel curled away, jumping down the last few steps. Blake chased after him. "Get back here!"

They ran around the entire foyer in circles, eliciting the attention of Ignacio and Frances. Frances yelled, "Get'em Blake!"

The front door opened with a long winded groan. Michael stepped out, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "What are you doing? We're going to be late!"

Just when Blake thought he could catch the tail end of Daniel's jacket, Daniel zipped up the grand staircase in a blur. Standing on top, he crossed his arms and grinned, looking way too pleased with himself. Blake rolled his eyes, "That's an abuse of power."

"Don't be jealous," Daniel fired back.

Blake almost gave him the finger, but a couple of maids carrying laundry passed between them. In another flash, Daniel stood right in front of him. He whispered, leaning close to Blake's face. "You seem like you're in better spirits than last night. I'm glad." He brushed his hand through Blake's curls and Blake perked up, his skin electrified enough to cause sparks.

Blake couldn't speak past the lump in his throat, so he just nodded. He wanted to say he slept great, but waking up inside of Daniel's arm caused quite the shock. It wasn't the first time they shared a bed and yet, when Blake opened his eyes to find Daniel sleeping so peacefully, he nearly teared up, Daniel looked so beautiful. And now, Blake couldn't tear his eyes away.

"Let's go people!" Michael clapped his hands, scaring Blake out of his bones. He turned around with his head down, practically storming towards the front door. He breezed by a cantankerous Michael huffing, "Where was this enthusiasm fifteen minutes ago when we were supposed to leave? Frances, if you don't come right now, you're going to be left behind and I mean it."

"Aye, aye captain," Frances saluted Michael and slung his arm around Ignacio's shoulders, pulling the demon along with his stride.

Daniel appeared by Blake's side his hand extended towards him. "Ready?"

"We're just walking to the car," Blake guffawed and rolled his eyes, trying a little too hard to play it cool. If he continued to bother Daniel, he was going to become an annoying brat to him all over

again. No matter how much Blake liked Daniel's gentle side.

For just a second, Blake caught Iggy's fingers snap and Blake felt his shoelaces tug. A yelp flew out of Blake's mouth as he lost balance with a first class ticket to meet the stone steps outside the palace. He never met the ground.

A strong pair of hands steadied him, and it was Daniel who was the one leaning closer with a grin plastered on his face, "Are you sure you don't want that help?"

Blake gulped.

Grabbing Blake's hand, Daniel linked their arms together tight. He patted Blake's arm and smiled like a little kid that just got everything he wanted. Blake rolled his eyes, but didn't struggle to escape Daniel's hold. Blake just avoided all eye contact to glare at Ignacio's back. He watched Ignacio's shoulders tremble as he held onto a laugh.

Blake kicked that nosy little demon. He was going to have to do a lot better than that to force Blake down that aisle.

#

Author's Note

Whoa! A Frances POV??? And Delphine? She was a bonus ;) This is like a Golden Rule reunion (for those who don't know, Frances and Delphine are from my Werewolf Romcom "The Golden Rule". Frances was the best friend character of the Alpha, Eric Silva. Frances makes lots of friends somehow. Lol). I hope you enjoyed the chapter!

Please leave your thoughts and feelings~ What do you think about the idea of Iggy and Frances? How do you think Daniel and Blake's relationship is coming along?

20. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

Smiling to himself, Daniel covered his grin with his hand. As if he could hide in the back of this compact car, he leaned against the window to make himself small. A fresh blanket of snow settled across Sagewick, dusting pine trees and coating rooftops. Cozy fires burned inside almost every house they passed, their chimneys billowing out plumes of grayish smoke. Slowly, Daniel stretched out his leg and nudged his knee against Blake's.

It was subtle.

The first time.

Blake didn't even notice, too distracted with peppering Ignacio with questions, "I'm just asking if you have a..." Blake whirled his hands around as if he could snatch the right word from the air. "A significant other?"

Daniel snorted, bumping Blake's knee a little harder. He teased, "Always so innocent."

"Quiet you," Blake snapped, using the back of his hand to smack Daniel's arm.

Ignacio tilted his head, leaning it against the leather head cushion. He sat in the front seat with Adrian at the wheel. Ignacio chuckled. "Are you asking if I have a lover?"

The way he said *lover* sounded like he might have invented the word. *This car was being threatened by a romantic*, Daniel thought.

"Yeah. Do you?"

"No. I've never had the pleasure of courting anyone."

"Well, have you thought about it? I mean, if everything goes your

way..." Blake started to explain, when he remembered Adrian at the driver's seat and Michael sitting in the very back, typing away on his laptop. Blake winced and tried again, "You might not be my assistant much longer. You could be free to date."

"I'll be free to do lot of things," Ignacio seemed eager to agree, while tap dancing around the subject all together. By his grin, Daniel could tell the little demon knew what he was doing, and Blake didn't have a clue. Ignacio went on to say, "Not even married yet and you're already trying to set up your single friends. Maybe we could do as the kids do today and *double date*."

"Who's teaching you about modern dating?" Daniel asked, suddenly suspicious, but he hadn't forgotten his game. Daniel nudged Blake again and this time, the cute wizard noticed. He shot Daniel a stern look just as Daniel feigned innocence, giving Ignacio his full attention. It took vampire levels of strength to stop himself from grinning.

"I'm an avid reader, your highness. The maids have given me self-help novels about finding someone who's marriage material and how to tell if a guy is just not into you. They've given me great magazine articles too. For example, do you know the that love has five languages. Fascinating stuff...?"

Daniel caught the sparkle in his eyes, and he knew, Blake had fallen right into his trap. Ignacio sharpened his blade, waiting for the final blow. "Words of affirmation, you know the way you two compliment each other..." he counted on his fingers and Daniel watched Blake's pale face burn a brighter red by the second, which made Daniel grin wider. Daniel could spend all day watching Blake's face go through a thousand different emotions in under a minute.

Ignacio went in for the kill, "Acts of service, like saving Blake that one time from the rogue vampire. There's receiving gifts like your new converses or—"

"I get it," Blake tried to stop him, but Iggy shook his head.

"I'm not done. There's also quality time, like the way you two spend

literally every single moment together and physical touch..." This time he didn't need to voice an example. His dark eyes flickered down at the way Daniel's knee was pressed to Blake's.

The next time Daniel nudged him, Blake finally caught on and merciless pinched his side, warning him, "How old are you? Be an adult and keep your bowlegged knees to yourself."

"Bowlegged?" Daniel gawked, grabbing Blake's side until he screamed with laughter.

"Hey," Adrian warned them from the driver's seat. "If you don't behave, I'm turning this car around."

Daniel's mouth dropped. "Why is it always me that gets into trouble?"

"Because you're a troublemaker," Blake answered, crossing his arms, and slumping against his seat. It was a legendary pout. "Trouble is your middle name with a capital T."

"All middle names are capitalized."

"I hate you so much."

"I'm getting car sick," Michael complained.

Daniel laughed again, feeling like a middle schooler, yanking the sleeve of his crush. He couldn't tear his eyes away from Blake, even after things settled down and long after the conversation changed. He was most happy when their eyes would meet by chance. He was disappointed when he saw their destination in the distance. Every moment he spent with Blake, he never wanted it to end.

#

BLAKE

Before Blake could think, Daniel hoped out of the car and held the door open for him. As Blake got out, Daniel loomed over the car door, looking down at Blake with that annoyingly smug smile. Blake meant it in the car. He hated this man. Somehow, he was

getting better looking every day. It was getting harder to look directly at him without blushing.

"Where are we anyways?" Blake asked, staring at the old building that seemed plucked from a Charles Dickens novel. It was also the only building on the street not decked out in Christmas decorations. He almost asked if Scrooge operated in this building.

"I already told you, Blake," Daniel said, adding his name for no reason and Blake was defeated yet again. The way he said his name gave Blake goosebumps. "I'm going to turn you into a prince. Now, you look the part..." Daniel picked a few random curls on top of Blake's head and played with the strands. "But it's time to walk the walk. A prince is only as charming as his manners."

"Don't tell me this is some etiquette school?"

"Then," Daniel dropped Blake's hair. "I won't say anything."

"Daniel," Blake lashed out to hit him, but Daniel caught his hand. He intertwined their fingers and dropped their hands to their sides.

"It's Madam Petunia's Etiquette School. Josephine and I went here when we were quite young. They won't make you carry books on your head or recite the Sagewick anthem."

"Sagewick has an anthem?"

Daniel laughed softly, tugging on Blake's hand as he led him to the sidewalk. "You're just going to learn dinner table etiquette." Daniel didn't let his hand go and Blake glanced down, admiring the stark differences between their complexions. He caught Daniel sliding his thumb down his finger, which caused Blake's heart to tremble. Blake was realizing he was very weak to Daniel's touch. It made him feel shy.

Adrian opened the door for them, and Daniel let Blake's hand go as they approached the front desk. His mouth gaping, Blake held his head up towards the ceiling taking in the splendor of the floral wallpaper that may even be hand painted with a teal and gold trimmings. The floors were so shiny, Blake could look down and see

his smiling reflection. A grand staircase hugged the side of the room on the opposite side of the front desk, its railings wrapped in a Christmas garland.

"Okay, girls...." Standing straight with a clipboard, an older woman waved her pen around like she was a conductor in front of a full orchestra. "You may start your descent..."

Another woman at the front desk hit the play button on a stereo, a pudgy relic from the 90s and a staticky instrumental piece began to play. Blake thought ballerinas were going to appear.

One by one a line of young girls dressed up in fluffy gowns walked down the white staircase. They looked like living works of watercolors, dripping with flowers and pearls. A pocket of Spring bloomed inside this old school.

"Chin up ladies," The older woman instructed, practically singing like a songbird. Her voice echoed through this foyer and bounced down the hall. "Shoulders back. Tessa, you're supposed to be gliding. We're not playing high stakes hopscotch."

Blake chuckled and folded his arms as he glanced at Daniel greeting the woman at the front desk, plus a few others. They must've heard a prince arrived and decided to gather around him like flies to honey. From the way they looked, they seemed to either own the place or manage it. Their eyes sparkled at the sight of him.

"I quite like Sagewick," Ignacio said, appearing by Blake's side. He held his hands behind his back, slightly swaying to the music.

"I like it too," Blake admitted, still staring at Daniel. "I like it more than I thought I would."

Daniel glanced at Blake, sneaking a peek away from his conversation. When their eyes met, Daniel smiled at him. Warmth flooded Blake's chest and he had to place his hand over his heart to keep it from falling out. Then, the woman at the desk touched his arm and Daniel was pulled back. Blake's shoulders slumped. He was sure anybody would try to keep a prince's attention as long as possible. There wasn't enough of Daniel to go around.

Daniel finally broke away and returned to Blake's side. He explained, "Okay. You'll have lunch with Madam Wilhelmina. She's supposed to be one of the best instructors. Plus, she's a part of my coven, so she knows who you are and will be able to teach you accordingly." He pulled up his sleeve to check his watch. "Michael and I should be back before you finish—"

Panic struck Blake like a lightning strike. He grabbed Daniel's arm, clutching the sleeve of his coat. "*Danny*, wait. You can't leave me here, like this. Without proper supervision."

Daniel chuckled and shook his head. "You'll be fine, I promise."

"But..." Blake's brow furrowed. He tried to come up with some excuse as to why Daniel should stay. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna pick out wedding colors. Just a handful so we can narrow them down and then, we can finalize it together. Do you have any requests?"

Blake deflated again. If he kept sighing like this, he was going to end up like a sad wrinkle pile of rubber from a popped balloon. "Just nothing with red. I hate the color red."

Out of the corner of Blake's eyes, he watched Ignacio cringed. Ignacio tried to hide it, but he couldn't release the tension in his silhouette. Blake's stomach dropped. The look in his eyes... it was the same eyes of the Ignacio in his dreams.

Only Blake noticed. Daniel just patted Blake's arm for encouragement and said, "Alright. Just have fun and remember, it's all for practice. Don't over think it."

Blake blinked. "When do I do that?"

Daniel didn't say. He just smiled and found Frances trying to distract the girls learning how to properly walk downstairs. It looked like the lady with the clipboard was one more second away from smacking him with it.

Blake tightened his jaw and snapped at Ignacio, "What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I..." Ignacio's words caught in his throat. He still couldn't shake his anxiety. "I am not sure what you mean. If I'm looking at you in a way that offends you, my apologies."

"You're lying to me."

"Blake." Ignacio shook his head, something on the tip of his tongue. Blake wanted to lure it out, but he wasn't given the chance.

"Sorry to interrupt," Michael said as he approached. "But I realized I haven't given you my number. I want you to call me or text me if your appointment ends before his highness and I make it back." Michael held out his hand for Blake's phone. While he retrieved it, Ignacio slipped away, and Blake couldn't stop him in time. He thought calling him back but gave up. Ignacio couldn't run forever.

Blake might have to rely completely on his dreams.

Waiting for Michael—who muttered over the complete unorganized mess his phone screen was—Blake locked eyes with a tall brunette woman. She had clear skin and almost violently vibrant blue eyes. Another vampire, if Blake had to guess. They all had this alien-like quality to them that didn't make them feel real. She walked over with such light footing. Blake couldn't hear her heels hit the ground.

"You must be Blake Winslow," she said, bending into a slight curtsy. "It's a pleasure to meet your acquaintance, your highness. I shall be your instructor, Madame Wilhelmina."

"Oh, uh yes!" Blake said, still flustered by the title. His face warmed immediately as if he was allergic to good manners. "Nice to meet you too."

The woman's smile tightened. She folded her hands in front of her and let her eyes do some quick observations. "It seems we're starting from scratch, hm?"

Blake laughed a little, past the lump forming in his throat. He suddenly had the urge to fidget and adjust his hair and clothes. His face only grew warmer, making him increasingly nervous. He tried

to lighten the situation, going along with her joke (even though he didn't think she was joking at all). "It seems so."

"And I only have a few hours. I may have to use extreme measures," she suggested as if it were nothing. Michael looked up from Blake's phone, watching her carefully. "But as a higher being I can use my powers to mold you a bit easier."

"Um, can you—?"

"Don't mumble, your highness. Speak clearly."

"I'm not sure what you're suggesting." Blake let out a shuddering breath.

"Were you never properly taught about other creatures in your home, or at school? I assumed the Winslow family could afford a proper education. My mistake. Even better reason to take advantage of my natural abilities. I can manipulate another creature's brain. For example..." With her red eyes peering down at Blake, her glossy lips quirked into a smirk that didn't sit well at the bottom of Blake's stomach. "Come now, *Straighten your shoulders*."

Immediately, Blake rolled his shoulders back straight. He felt like a puppet and his strings were yanked taut. He wanted to look at Michael for help maybe, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from Madame Wilhelmina. He felt the kind of light-headed feeling one might feel before their vision burns to black and they pass out.

"*Chin up*," her demands continued and each time, Blake helplessly complied. "Let's try our introductions again. Women such as myself curtsey, but you would *simply bow your head and offer a: how do you do*?"

The words were pulled from Blake's mouth as if by hand, "How do you do?"

"Excellent. You're less likely to forget these things now, am I correct?"

Mrs. Wilhelmina released Blake, but he didn't dare slouch and inspire more of her wrath. Blake said, "Yes."

"Good. Now, if you'd excuse me, I'll make sure our room is ready for today's lesson."

Blake nodded, holding his breath until she was far enough away that she wouldn't hear his sigh. Michael pounced too, grabbed Blake's arm. He pulled him, shaking him out of the last of his daze. Michael's brows furrowed, his worry palpable. "Are you alright, Blake?"

"I'm fine." Blake took another deep breath. He needed to relax, to shake off this static feeling of anxiety. Blake had been enjoying his time in Sagewick so much, he had forgotten the true power of a vampire. He had forgotten that in this world of magic and monsters, they were the world's most dangerous predator. Their powers relied on violence, whether that meant taking a bite out of someone's neck or warping their senses and taking a sledgehammer to their emotions. Blake had never felt weaker.

"No." Michael argued and grabbed Blake's other arm. He stood in front of Blake, making him the only person he could see as Michael attempted to look right through him. "No, you're not. I have a bullshit detector and—" Realizing himself, Michael let go of Blake and held his hands stiffly at his sides. The way he spoke even sounded like he was holding himself back. "With all do respect your highness. If you're uncomfortable with Madame Wilhelmina, Prince Daniel wouldn't want you to stay here. I know he can be..."

Blake smiled a little. "Speak freely, Michael."

"Thank you, sir..." With Blake's permission, Michael's eloquent tone vanished and he spoke with so much more inflection than usual. The way he even stood looked less robotic. "I know Prince Daniel can be thick, but he genuinely cares about you. The man won't know something's wrong though, unless you tell him. He's oblivious. Always has been."

"No!" Blake insisted. "I need to do this. I want to feel useful in some way. I want to show Daniel that I'm dependable that I'm not this..." He held up his arms as if all the proof he needed was right in front Michael's eyes. "Giant man child that always needs protecting."

"What? His highness has already spoken your praises. You're an accomplished wizard."

"I guess, I want to be dependable for something other than what I've been born with. Really Michael." Forcing himself to smile, Blake rubbed Michael's arm with a steady hand. "I'll be fine. Thank you though... I'm going to find Iggy and warn him." Dropping his head, Blake avoided looking at Michael anymore than he had to.

He meant what he said. Daniel had already done so much for him and it was time he paid him back in some way. Blake just wanted to do one thing for Daniel. Even a small way like this, like arriving at a dinner as someone worthy of Daniel's company. He was terrified of failing this test and disappointing Daniel or even worse, he'd hate for Daniel to think Blake didn't care about his feelings. Blake did care. He hated how much he cared. Their relationship was so fragile after years of hating each other.

If they went back to how they were before, Blake would spend the rest of his life regretting it because he'd always remember there was a small window in time where they got along. There was a time when Blake Winslow and Daniel Bellerose might have been best friends. Might have been closer than anyone.

Blake stopped in the middle of the hallway as he spotted Daniel on his phone. He stood in front of a window that was surrounded by golden tinsel and lights.

"Oh, god," Blake whispered, his heart beating loud and had against his chest. His heart didn't know the meaning the word mercy. His face flushed as he came to the realization, "I think I like you."

#

Author's Note

This chapter really got away from me XD It was longer than expected and I even had to move the next scene into the next chapter. Hope you're all doing well! See you again soon~

Tell me what you thought about the chapter? From Daniel's childish

flirting, to the school and finally, let me know your thoughts on Blake's realization. Lol.

If you like this book, be sure to check out my other novels. I have three completed! And a new werewolf/vampire/human romance that's currently at chapter three called "My Mate, His Mate and Me"!

21. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

This place brought back old memories. Daniel recalled how exhausting he was after every stuffy etiquette class. He wasn't like the other students who could fail and learn as they went. Daniel needed to perform and make sure he was setting the best example during every class and even in-between sessions.

Some of the kids joked that he was only a natural because of the royal blood coursing through his veins. They really had no idea just how much he was trying and giving his all. Meanwhile, Josephine spent more time goofing off and gossiping than actually learning.

For whatever reason, he felt a strong compulsion to call his cousin. When she picked up, she asked, "What's wrong? Did I make a mistake somewhere in the schedule? I could've sworn I triple-checked that thing. Even Michael gave me the thumbs up... well, he didn't really reply at all, but that's like receiving high praise from him."

"No, no, I just wanted to call. You'll never guess where I am."

She was quiet.

Daniel just assumed it was because she really had no guesses. Daniel laughed. "I'm at Madam Petunia's Etiquette School. I just found a piece of the wall where you carved your name and..." Daniel dropped to his hind legs and peered at a strange carving. "And you etched a penis into the wall? Josephine, honestly? Your mother would've shipped you off to boarding school if you had gotten caught."

That day, all those years ago, Daniel was asked to stand guard while Josephine used a small pocketknife, she borrowed from one of the other boys to quote her: "leave her mark." He didn't want to do it, but he figured he'd be blamed for her antics as if stopping her was

somehow his job. Nothing could stop his cousin from doing anything. However, if she never got caught, they'd both be saved from their parents' fury.

"Daniel?" Josephine questioned.

"Josephine? Are you breaking up?"

"No, I'm just making sure it's you I'm talking to."

"Who else would it be?"

"I don't know. A body swapper? A liar? You've never called me before just to have a chat."

"Never? That can't be true."

"I've tried calling you, but you always say you're too busy. If I were cruel, I'd hang up on you right now. You're lucky I'm a softie. And you're right, I can't believe you're there! I'd catch fire if I stepped one foot back into that place. Does it still smell like wood polish?"

Daniel chuckled and nodded. "You'd think time had stopped."

"I hate it. You're not taking a class, are you? No, you must be hosting a seminar on how to shake hands for three hours or you're giving advice on the secret to avoiding cutesy nicknames. Bubbles should've stuck."

"I'm pretty sure I blocked that one out."

Josephine laughed and Daniel checked the time. "Sorry if I bothered you. Just wanted to call before I had a meeting over wedding colors."

"No trouble at all. Daniel, you can call me whenever you want."

Daniel nodded. Carefully, he picked up a floor vase and moved it a few inches to cover Josephine's name. "You can call me too. Will you be at dinner? My mother wants us all to start eating together before the wedding."

"Wouldn't miss it."

They said their goodbyes, so Daniel put away his phone. It was only then he noticed Michael standing to the side. Something seemed off about his assistant, something so important that Michael couldn't help but ask, "Your highness, may I have a word?"

Daniel pocketed his phone and steadied himself. When conversations began like this, they never ended up well. This never ended with Daniel being told he was doing a great job and they didn't know the definition of the word problem.

"Of course..." He crossed his arms and glanced around to make sure they had enough privacy. Still, he leaned in closer to make sure. "What's wrong? You seem upset."

Taking a deep breath, Michael worked up the nerve to ask, "If I could, may I speak freely?"

"Michael, I know..." This threw Daniel for a loop. He dropped his arms and tried to string his thoughts together. He never wanted to be misunderstood. "I know I've been blind for quite some time, but I do value your opinion. I wouldn't just let anyone be by my side all the time."

"And I'll receive no repercussion?"

"Wow." Daniel laughed. "How bad did I do?"

"Your highness, with all due respect sir, this is a terrible idea. Madame Wilhelmina is a venomous snake and she'll crush Blake Winslow into dust."

"But she treated me very well when I went to her as a kid—"

"Because you're a prince. You were well-trained before you even went to that woman. Blake Winslow is a normal twenty-one-year-old that didn't ask for this. Yes, I think we should prepare him for the dinner party, but this is not the way to do it."

Daniel sighed, letting his shoulders slump. He glanced at Josephine's writing on the wall and looked back at Blake by the

front desk. Blake was fidgeting, spinning his engagement ring around his finger. Daniel knew this point in Blake's life was just a bump in the road. One day, Blake was going to talk about the time he spent as a fiancé to a prince... Daniel would be a footnote, an anecdote to Blake's much grander life. He did hope it was something he'd fondly look back on. Not like a bad dream.

Daniel knew Blake had his fill of nightmares.

"Okay."

"And furthermore," Michael continued to stand his ground. It was more like he was going through the list he had already rehearsed. Daniel's answer wasn't part of the plan. "You also shouldn't tease him too much and make sure he's calling his parents and—" Michael straightened up. His eyes fluttered in surprise; a look Daniel didn't recognize on his assistant. "Okay? That's it? Just okay? We'll leave?"

"I heard you, Michael and I think you're right. I can lift a car over my head, but that doesn't mean I can never be wrong." Daniel's chest tightened as he came to the clear realization, "I think I'm always the most wrong when it comes to Blake. I hope you know I don't mean to be."

"Of course, sir," Michael agreed, his voice soft.

Daniel smiled. "But do you mind taking the fall for this? Let's say you double booked us and we're forced to reschedule. I'd hate to upset the school."

"I'd be honored, sir."

"Alright. I'm going to try to find Frances as well and make sure he's not causing a fire or something." Checking his watch, Daniel glanced around for his fiendish friend. "We'll meet back up at the car. I have an idea of where we can go instead."

#

BLAKE

Blake lost sight of Ignacio since they had that awkward moment in

the foyer. When that demon ran away, he really disappeared. He might've even poofed out of existence. Mortal cowards wished they had that power. Sometimes Blake did too.

He crept up a few stairs, glancing at the second story. The future debutantes scrambled off the stairs a few minutes ago and filed into the ballroom. Through the old thin walls, Blake could make out more symphonic music. Something about this place made him feel sucked into the past. Yet again. At least, this time he wasn't dreaming and could leave whenever he wanted.

Blake was worried about going to sleep tonight.

He was worried about a lot of things.

"Blake—"

An actual scream flew out of Blake's mouth as he spazed out and nearly slipped down the stairs. He turned to find Michael cringing against the outburst. Blake's face and neck went hot as he sheepishly smiled. "Um, sorry."

"Come here, you silly thing," Michael motioned him. Dropping his head, Blake met him at the bottom of the stair where Michael put his arm around him. "Before you say anything, I must tell you that I like you very much..."

Blake gaped, stunned by the confession. "Michael, I—"

"I said don't say anything."

Blake mimed zipping his mouth closed and tried to keep from smiling like an idiot. After all these years on this earth, Blake didn't know how to make friends. He forgot that skill somewhere along middle school and after he lost so much practice, Blake didn't make friends again. He had his brothers and his parents, but that wasn't the same. It wasn't like this.

Michael went on. His usual icy blue eyes melted into a warm baby blue pool. "I think you're the nicest person I've ever met. Maybe even nicer than my husband and he's quite nice to me. You're already going through a hard time, don't make it any worse for

yourself. No one wants you to be in an uncomfortable position, okay?"

Blake let out a breath. "Okay."

"You're not getting away that easy, though. We still have to prepare you for the dinner tomorrow. Oh, Frances—" Michael straightened and let Blake go, but his touch lingered on more than his skin. He could feel it inside his heart.

Sauntering all alone, which was suspicious enough, but made worse by Frances wearing someone's rose corsage and was swinging what looked like a fire poker, Michael gestured the vampiric prince like he was a common mutt off the street, snapping and motioning him. "Frances, come on. You're lucky I made a mistake with the schedule and we have to leave."

"What?" Frances went through waves of emotions. From confusion, amusement, and finally landing on pure amazement. "Michael, did you sign me up for an etiquette class?"

"And I'd do it again given the chance. We're going back to the car. I'm not sure where we're going, so you can just follow us."

"Hey," Blake cut into the conversation. "I can't seem to find Iggy. Do me a favor and find him for me, will you?"

"It'll be my pleasure," Frances grinned, looking absolutely delighted. He took off, ripping off the corsage and tossing the fire poker into Blake's arms. He was too far down the hall to stop him as he quickly fingered his hair back and adjusted his dress shirt. Michael just rolled his eyes and grabbed the fire poker from Blake. With it, he left to surrender himself to the front desk.

"My, my," Adrian said as he wandered up to Blake's side. "We didn't even need to take our coats off."

"Yeah," Blake said, sheepishly. He made eye contact with the person behind the front desk in time to catch their aghast look. Blake's face grew hot as he looked away, shrinking inside his peacoat.

"I think you could've handled it," Adrian said. "I don't care what

Daniel and Michael say. You're stronger than they think."

Blake nodded. "Thank you, but I don't think they meant it that way."

Adrian went on, unresponsive to Blake's comment. He shrugged a little, before placing his hand on the small of Blake's back as he led Blake towards the exit. "But I suppose it doesn't really matter in the end. I imagine after this month and the press are bored with you, Daniel will have you stay inside the castle. I mean, if they don't prepare you, you'll just embarrass the coven."

"No, no, Michael says they have a plan B."

"But it won't be as good as what you could've learned here. You missed your opportunity. Don't be upset," Adrian said with a smile. "Next time, you'll be able to succeed."

Blake's stomach twisted into knots.

Did he fail? Is that what Adrian was getting at? That was the very last thing he wanted anyone to think about him, especially Daniel. If this was part of the race to the wedding day, Blake just tripped. He fell flat on his face and was falling behind. Every second, he was wasting his opportunity to catch up. He wasn't like Damien, who they all knew would inherit Winslow Apothecary or like Link, who had a natural knack for mixing potions. No one ever expected anything out of Blake.

Until now.

And he was failing.

"Next time," Adrian suggested, "Why don't you tell me what's wrong? Then, we can decide if we want to tell Daniel or Michael. Together. How's that sound?"

"Um," Blake struggled to speak past the swollen lump wedged inside his throat. He didn't recognize his own voice, the way he mumbled and the way he wasn't at all sure of himself anymore. "Okay. Maybe. That's not a terrible idea."

Adrian smiled wider, so everything must be right with the world. He leaned in close to Blake's face before ruffling his curls. "Good. I'm going to fetch the car. Stay there and behave, won't you?"

"How dare you?" Blake smiled a little, happy to brush aside some of the tension. "I always behave."

"That's why you're my favorite."

Blake smiled and watched Adrian leave, but the tightness in his chest didn't slack. He buttoned up his jacket, wrapping himself up a bit deeper as he tried to conserve his warmth. Looking up at the soupy gray sky, he thought he might be able to catch the first fall of a snowflake.

"There you are," Daniel said as he poked his head outside. Seeing him inspired Blake to let out a breath.

Good, Blake thought. He didn't seem mad.

"What are you doing out here?" Daniel asked. "Come back inside, it's cold."

"I can't. Adrian told me to wait here."

Daniel's brow quirked, but he didn't argue. "Then, I'll wait with you."

Blake didn't try to stop him. Blake didn't know what to say at all or how to start a conversation. Finally, Blake worked up the courage to speak and ended up blurting out, "I'm sorry" at the same time, Daniel said, "I must apologize."

They both perked up.

"What?" They asked together again, which made them both laugh.

"Let me go first." Daniel raised his hand, asking for permission. "Because I don't want you to apologize to me."

"But I should," Blake insisted. "We came all the way out here just because you're trying to help me and I couldn't follow through with

it."

Daniel shook his head. "We came out here because I didn't speak to you first. I didn't ask you if you would be okay with coming to this school. I should have. I don't want to force you to do anything that makes you unhappy."

"But you could, right? Just like Mrs. Wilhelmina. You could use your powers to make me act like a prince."

Daniel's brow narrowed. "Excuse me? Are you saying Wilhelmina Mesmerized you? That is a cruel power a vampire possesses—" Daniel turned his head back at the school as Blake could see him getting more and more worked up. "I can't believe she'd do that. After I specifically told her to take good care of you. What kind of school is this—? They're going to have a piece of my mind—"

"Danny!" Blake piped up, grabbing the vampire's arm before he went speeding off. "Stop! You don't have to! We're already leaving, aren't we?"

"Still..." Daniel didn't budge. "It's not right. They at least deserve a strongly worded letter, don't you think?"

Bowing his head, Daniel looked utterly defeated. "I just can't get anything right. I must be the worst fiancé in the world. What kind of husband am I going to make if I put you in these kinds of situations? Because I didn't ask your opinion. Because I'm such an ass."

Blake's mouth gaped.

He just so casually, so effortlessly called himself Blake's fiancé.

No, Blake realized, feeling a fire break out across his body and he forgot all about the cold. *Daniel named himself as Blake's husband.* Blake thought his heart might crashed right through the middle of his chest and land right into Daniel's hands.

Blake's hands slid down the length of Daniel's arm until he found his cold fingers. They became intertwined and Daniel finally relaxed. As he turned, he inched closer and Blake found himself

only inches away from Daniel's face. He smiled shyly, gazing into the molten golden eyes of his fiancé. "You've always been an ass. I don't expect you to change that much."

"But I haven't changed at all."

"That's not true. Just a few weeks ago, you would've never admitted you were wrong."

"Yeah, I don't know if I like this whole being wrong thing."

"I like it."

"Me being wrong?" Daniel tilted his head, a smirk hanging off his lips. Blake was drawn in by the shape of his mouth. It made him bite his own bottom lip. "Or do you like me?"

"You're alright."

"Just alright?"

That seemed to amuse Daniel more. His face drew even closer, but it was Daniel's lips that retained Blake's attention. He was brought back 500 years ago since he was forced to watch their ancestors kiss over and over again. The last time Blake kissed anyone it was in a dream.

A really nice dream.

A really nice kiss.

Blake's attention climbed upward as he faced the heat in Daniel's eyes. They were two pools of molten magma and Blake was liquifying inside of them. He could be melted down and fastened into becoming their wedding bands.

Then, a knock on the door caused both men to jump. Blake's heart hit the roof of his mouth

Frances whined in one window, while Ignacio stood in the other, holding his face as his eyes sparkled. Frances begged, "Can we please leave? You're blocking the door? Why can't you two just flirt

in the car?"

Clearing his throat, Daniel opened the door for them just as Ignacio shoved Frances, forcing the vampire to stumble. "They were so close to kissing! And right in front of us too! Who knows when they might kiss again, and who knows if I'll be able to watch!"

Frances held his hands up, but he didn't look as guilty as he looked amused.

Michael sighed. He looked at Ignacio as if he could see the demon's horns. "You are by far the strangest assistant I have ever met."

Shaking his head, Michael walked between Blake and Daniel like they were a pair of saloon doors. Daniel caught Blake's eyes and he snorted, his shoulders jumping up in his coat. Blake, despite his flushed face rolled his eyes and followed Michael. Without a word, Daniel held out his arm again, just like before.

This time, Blake took it without a fight. Without a word.

He kept his eyes straight ahead, feeling the prickle of stares from both Daniel and Ignacio. No one remarked on it. Not with words anyways. Blake steeled his expression and pretended not to hear Ignacio wistfully sigh from happiness.

#

Author's Note

Hey guys! Nice to see you again :) Hope you're all doing well. Writing this chapter just reminds me why I love writing romance so much.

Don't forget to tell me what you thought about the chapter! What did you think about Michael's confession? And how well do you think etiquette class with Frances would've gone? Lol. And do you think Blake should've let Daniel storm back inside the school?

Also, my apologies for the "almost" kiss. We're not there YET, haha. But maybe soon ;) Do you think we're gonna have to wait until they reach the alter (if they reach the alter)?

As always, don't forget to vote on the chapter and add it to your library to keep up with updates. And if you like this book, be sure to check out my other books. I have three completed novels (and one novella)!

22. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

Frances raised his hand, raising his voice even louder. "In this dinner party, I wanna play a prince!" His voice bounced all over the ballroom at the Venture Hotel. It stood grandly in the center of Sagewick and most tourists flocked to it.

This afternoon, Daniel appreciated the hotel more for its convenient spot, less for ornate windows that let in so much crisp natural lighting or soaring ceilings. It was painted a pure cotton white color while the trimmings remained gold to matching the hanging chandeliers. Here, they could have anything and everything delivered with the upmost ease. One by one, cakes from all over Sagewick were being brought to their one round table, surrounded by the emptiness. This way, they had something to eat and they could pick out their cake.

Daniel loved multitasking as much as he loved a new pair of socks.

Michael sighed, the vein in his forehead throbbing. He had shed his blazer and loosened his tie. Something about him needed to be put at ease when everything about this etiquette class was going to be anything but easy.

Michael rubbed one of his eyes and explained to Frances like he was a preschooler, "You're already a prince, Frances. And besides, I already told you, we don't even need characters-"

"I'll be a lord!" Ignacio piped up as if he nothing Michael said. Frances leaned closer to him, sparks practically whizzing from his form, he seemed so happy. "But I'm secretly a musician of meager beginnings, sneaking into the court to woo my true love."

"That's the spirit!" Frances threw his hands up as he leaned back into his chair, raising the two front legs. "I wanna be a duchess that is sleeping with every man and woman in court and selling their

secrets."

Frances winked at Ignacio.

"Then, I'll be the prince," Adrian said with an amused smile.

Giving up, Michael stated, "Only Prince Daniel and Blake get to be the princes."

Adrian shrugged. "Then, a king will do."

Daniel met Adrian's eyes, a strange coil tightening around his heart. Something didn't sit right with Daniel, but he couldn't place the cause. Adrian had always been cold to Daniel. Even when he was a kid, Adrian didn't seem overly impressed with him... but Adrian was always a man of duty. This attitude was off.

"I'll understand if you want to change roles," Blake whispered to Daniel, just lightly touching his leg.

"The court jester does seem rather tempting," Daniel spoke low, only for Blake to hear. He leaned in closer and watched in amusement as Blake's cheeks reddened. Daniel realized the closer he got the more Blake seemed to blush. Nothing delighted Daniel more.

But that tightness in his chest remained.

Glancing at Adrian, Daniel noticed he was watching. Daniel's smile widened as his childish nature flared up again. He sat his hand on Blake's thigh and whispered right into his ear, "But I don't think the hat would suit me."

Blake laughed nervously.

And Daniel's eyes wandered back to Adrian, whose jaw was clenched tight. His hand curled around his fork as he asked Michael, "Any advice on how to handle unpolite dinner guests? Or guests you simply dislike?"

"Yes." Michael nodded. "Actually, pretend they're dogs or a baby and pretend you can't understand what in the world they're saying,

so just be agreeable for the sake of being agreeable."

"Hmm."

Daniel stuck his fork through the closet cake, down seven layers of chocolate and mousse. He held it up for Blake, keeping his free hand underneath to catch the crumbs. Blake's eyebrows shot up, but he still took the bite. He licked the stray frosting off his lips and Daniel's mouth watered. He wished they were alone.

"Your highness," Michael said, "I shouldn't have to tell you feeding someone else at the table is not proper. Save it for the bedroom."

Frances snorted.

This earned him a whack with one of the many takeout menus that came with the cake. Michael walked around to Blake's side and began explaining the utensil placements and when to use them. Blake seemed hyper focused, nodding and sometimes even repeating what Michael told him.

"Now, let's pretend the cake options from Sweet Delights bakery is the soup course." Michael motioned everyone to dig in and Blake shakily grabbed the soup spoon.

Daniel assured him, "Don't be nervous."

"That's not possible," Blake insisted.

"You don't need to worry. I don't expect you to know everything. I'll tell you, what I already told you before we faced the paparazzi. If you're lost, if you feel like you're struggling, just look at me."

#

BLAKE

"Just look at me," he said.

Blake thought it'd be harder to *stop* looking at him.

Blake had spent his whole life looking at Daniel Bellerose. The

reason has just changed over the years. Over the last few weeks. The last few days. Hours. Blake's chest was aching.

They did the whole four course meal over more cakes than Blake even thought existed. He figured cakes started with vanilla and stopped at red velvet with a few chocolate choices in-between. But they ended picking a dark chocolate champagne cake with Champagne Swiss Meringue Buttercream and this creamy dark chocolate ganache.

For the vampires, the stronger the flavor the better for their numbed taste buds.

They also picked wedding colors, navy and gray with white for details. After a long debate between the entire table, flowers were chosen. For the table, there'd be anemones, roses, and all kinds of greenery from a local shop. Danny and Blake would also wear white anemone boutonnieres. Michael threw out a bunch of other decisions, but Blake begged for all the adulting to end so they could go home and be lazy.

Michael folded despite himself, muttering about seeing his husband early. Blake wanted to meet Michael's husband so badly, but first he should remember his name.

"Hey, Iggy," Frances called upon the demon as they exited the hotel. They were splitting, Frances towards his motorcycle and the rest towards the car. Ignacio stopped in the middle. Frances offered a black motorcycle helmet. "Wanna hop on with me?"

"Huh? Me?" Ignacio pointed to himself to be sure.

Blake nudged Daniel several times with his elbow.

"I got it," Daniel whispered.

Clutching his hands together in mock prayer, Ignacio tiptoed towards Frances' bike. He looked at it like it was going to snap at his ankles. "I've never ridden a metal beast like this... is it similar to riding a horse?"

"Sure." Frances shrugged, offering the helmet again. "But better."

"Big talk. I've ridden a horse that could jump rivers."

"You want tricks? I can do a few of those."

"Oh, that I don't doubt..." Ignacio grinned wickedly, when he must've remembered the rest of the party standing behind him. He glanced at Blake with his big puppy dog eyes. "I uh can't leave Blake—"

"Sure you can." Blake waved Ignacio towards the bike and Frances. "Go have some fun. You're going to have to get used to new experiences, right?" Blake winked, putting his whole body into it. "It's such a human thing to do, you know?" Blake winked again, even louder than the first time.

Ignacio brightened.

He snatched the helmet and shoved it onto his head. "Let's see how fast this tiny metal horse can go."

"Make sure you hold on," Frances warned.

Ignacio settled himself in the seat behind Frances, placing his hands on the vampire's shoulders, clutching his leather jacket. Rolling his eyes, Frances reminded him, "That's not holding on. You're gonna fall off and I'm not qualified to replace Blake's assistant."

Frances took Ignacio's hands and pulled them around his waist until Ignacio enraptured the vampire. They met each other's eyes briefly over Frances' shoulder, but as quickly as they looked, Frances turned back around and revved his engine.

They sped off and Blake's face was going to crack from all the smiling. He tapped the back of his hand to Daniel's chest, an excitement bubbling up inside of him. "I think I understand Iggy a little bit better! That was really fun to watch."

"Oh, come on you, dork," Daniel said, throwing his arm around Blake's shoulders before he dragged Blake to the car.

With Adrian at the helm, they started the drive back to the castle. Speaking softly, Michael and Adrian shared thoughts on tomorrow's

schedule, figuring out what they could get done before the charity dinner. Blake stared at the window as his exhaustion sunk into his skin. He leaned his head back and debated resting his eyes.

With an overdramatic sigh, Daniel dropped all his weight against Blake as he rested his head on Blake's shoulder. Blake tensed up. "What are you doing?" This close, Daniel could surely hear the grand band losing its mind inside Blake's chest, his heart playing as the passionate conductor.

"*Sshh*," Daniel hushed the panicking wizard. "Let me recharge here before dinner."

Blake smiled a little, glancing down at his hands. He nervously rubbed his fingers as a maybe terrible idea floated to the top of his thoughts. Blake's hand moved on its own as he stole Daniel's hand and brought it to his lap. He wasn't quite holding Daniel's hand, but examining his fingers and the line of his palm.

Blake debated secretly texting Adrian to tell him to take the long way to the castle.

This might be the best part of Blake's entire day.

Maybe even the entire trip.

#

"We don't have to like dress up for dinner, right?" Blake asked Daniel as they walked up the stairs towards their rooms. Blake needed to use the railing to help him up each and every step. Maids skittered by waving and saying hello. Daniel greeted them, knowing all of their names.

"You haven't had to dress up so far," Daniel reminded him.

"Yeah, but—"

"Yes," Michael corrected.

"*Yes*." Blake started again, gifting Michael with an exasperated look. "But this sounds like a legit dinner."

"Just come as you are Blake," Daniel said. "There's no need to try to impress my parents. They knew you when you used to pee your pants."

"That was one time!" Blake shoved Daniel with all his might up the rest of the stairs, catching the vampire just as he was grinning and chuckling to himself. The shove caught him off guard enough to make him stumble onto the next level.

"Whoa!" Daniel said, maneuvering out of the way from someone walking by.

Blake perked up, taking a step back. The way his life had been lately, he thought maybe he was dreaming or just seeing things again. But after a second, he knew it was real and the exhaustion weighing him down before was gone.

"Link!" Blake cried, pushing past everyone to run to his older brother.

Link Winslow stood taller than Blake remembered, but still as skinny as a rail with his thick black glasses framing his similar purple eyes. "You're back early!" Link said, getting the wind knocked out of him as Blake slammed into his chest.

Burying his face in his brother's chest, Blake squeezed Link with all of his might and breathed in the smell of incense and home grown herbs and lavender from their homemade lotion. He could feel the tickle of Link's magic, the warm fuzzy feeling of rubbing a worn baby blanket up and down his cheek.

"I'm so happy to see you," Blake said.

Link held back even tighter. "Good to see you're in one piece." He pulled back, keeping his hands place firmly on Blake's shoulder. His head titled, letting his flop of curls fall to one side. "Actually, you look better than ever. Being a prince suits you."

"Thanks." Blake couldn't stop smiling. "Are Mom and Dad with you? What about Damien?"

"They're around. You know they had so much catching up to do.

And Damien—" He stopped as he noticed Daniel only a few feet away. "Daniel! What's up, man? It's a been a while."

Letting Blake go, Link awkward opened his arms but closed them. He went for a handshake instead. Daniel laughed and took the hug. "It has. How are you?"

"G-good!" Link looked at Blake all wide-eyed and flabbergasted, but Blake didn't help him. He was so excited to see his brother. Knowing his parents were somewhere in these halls lightened them and made the shadows disappear.

Meanwhile, Link's brain short circuited, making his words skip like a broken record. "U-um, the—they uh, plane ride is uh longer than I remembered." When Daniel let him go seemed to be the moment Link held his senses again. "But this place is the same. I even snagged my old room."

"Good, please make yourselves at home like you used to. We're family."

Link glanced at Blake again. "Yeah, in a little more of an official capacity now, right? Oh shit. That reminds me." He snapped his fingers before pointing at Blake. "You should go stop Damien from rifling through your room."

He didn't even need to finish.

All the blood drained from Blake's face and he took off. Link yelled after him, "I think he's looking for evidence or something!"

Blake bowed his head and funneled all his strength into his legs. He skidded past his room, rounding back and throwing the door open to find Damien halfway under the bed with his legs spilling out. "DAMIEN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!"

He stomped over, grabbing his older brother's legs and started yanking him out. "This is an invasion of my privacy!"

"What's the harm of looking if you have nothing to hide?" Damien said as if that was even close to a valid argument. "I'm just worried about you." He twisted around with a soft little embarrassed smile.

He tried to make himself look as innocent as possible, but Blake wasn't falling for it.

"I'm an adult, Damien and I need my space."

"After the wedding, we'll have a whole ocean of space!" Damien pulled his legs free. Blake rolled his eyes, unable to hold back a long tortured groan. Damien scurried to his feet and ran to Blake's nightstand. From the doorway, Daniel was holding himself together to keep from falling apart from all the laughing. Blake didn't know who he wanted to strangle more.

"I just wanna make sure Daniel's being gallant!" Damien insisted.

"What does it matter?! We're going to be married by this time next month!" Blake shouted. He wrapped his arms around Damien and tried yanking him back towards the door. That giant dumb brother of Blake's barely budged an inch. "You're going to have to find someone else to fixate on!"

"But how am I supposed to rest not knowing if Daniel is being good to you!" Damien made a move, but Blake didn't let go. He let himself be dragged across the room to the dresser.

"My love life is none of your business! If I trust Danny that should be enough for you!"

"No! No! You're too nice! You've always been too nice. I mean, the way guys think—" He finally stopped rifling through Blake's clothes and pockets to take out a phone. It was not Damien's phone, but Blake recognized it all the same. Damien showed him the screen and a flurry of texts. "Look at the way Link texts these girls! It's filthy!"

"What?!" Link yelped, suddenly no longer on the side lines. He rushed over, lunging for his phone. He hit his siblings too hard and they all tripped and stumbled, Damien hitting the floor first, then taking Blake and Link along with him.

Blake's brain went confused, unsure who he was hitting and where he ended up on this dog pile. One of his stupid brother's aftershave

was too strong and stung his eyes. The only clear thing was Daniel's laughter. "The Winslow brothers back at the Sagewick castle. I couldn't be happier."

"You just wait!" Blake shouted. "After I'm done with these two, you're next!"

Daniel only laughed harder. "I'm trembling!"

Michael wedged himself through the door with his hands already up in defeat. "If anyone's interested, dinner is ready."

Blake got up first, wrapping his arms around Michael's waist. "Will you and your husband adopt me? I wanna be an only child."

"I have a feeling your parents would strongly object."

"Come on, Damien," Daniel coaxed Damien out into the hallway.

"I just worry about him," Damien pouted as Link stormed past, shoving his phone in his pocket.

"I promise it's all going to be fine and I'll take good care of him. Damien, that was the first I've even be inside of Blake's room."

Confused, Blake glanced at Daniel over his shoulder.

Daniel winked with a wicked little smile.

Quickly, Blake turned back around, unable to keep from smiling. His cheeks ached from smiling only a little. Maybe the blush didn't help. Or his heart jumping up and down. He never realized that liking someone could be such a painful experience.

He might be more far gone than he thought before.

#

Author's Note

Oh man. I STRUGGLED with this chapter. I've been in an editing mode for the last month that it's a struggle to write new words.

Hopefully, I'll find a balance soon. This chapter ended up being too long and not long enough. I'm bursting with all the things that are going to happen next. I'm so excited to share! >.<

It's also close enough to the end of this book that I've chosen my next novel. It's a magical romcom. A Scott Pilgrim VS the World meets Practical Magic. No title yet!

Anyways, please share your thoughts and feelings! How do you feel about Daniel finally noticing Adrian's strange attitude? Do you think he'll do something about it? And Iggy went with Frances! Now, Blake's ship is sailing, haha. The Winslow family has arrived too! How not surprised are you that Damien immediately started investigating? Haha.

Also, I can't believe I made the same mistake AGAIN. If y'all remember, I had characters Eric and Elias from The Golden Rule and I would constantly accidentally switch their names while writing... I just KNOW I'm going to do the same with Damien and Daniel. Lord help me.

If you like this book, check out my other novels!

23. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Blake, his brothers and Daniel found their way into the parlor room, but Blake pushed through them and ran inside first. His mother jumped from her seat with her arms wide open. "Blake!"

The moment he saw his mother Emma, Blake's eyes filled with tears. They looked alike in so many ways from their drooping eyes, pale skin, and slender limbs, but she was so much soft like powdered snow. It was as if a soft filter encased his mother that made some people catch their breaths. She wore a nice black dress, something nicer than usual with Etienne, the king sitting at her side.

If Blake could fly, he would've done it. He rushed into her arms and held her so tight he thought he may never let go. She stroked the back of his head, brushing her fingers through the curls they shared. She felt so warm, so incredibly warm.

"I've missed you so much," she whispered, rocking him a little.

"Not as much as I've missed you." Blake laughed through his tears. He tried wiping them away, but he wasn't quick enough. Behind him, he could feel someone approach and his mother gushed.

"Oh, my Daniel. It's so good to see you..."

Blake glanced around just as Daniel appeared by his side with a smile. He placed his arm around Blake, rubbing his shoulder. They locked eyes and Blake nodded, reassuring Daniel that he was really alright and wiped away the last of his tears.

Blake's mother tilted her head. "You know, now that I see you together, you two do make a handsome couple."

"Thank you." Daniel grinned, glancing at Blake as if saying *"Isn't that*

interesting?"

Damien groaned from the door. "I'm getting a drink."

#

DANIEL

Daniel took a crystal glass from Damien that was full of a dark liquid. He took a quick whiff, surmising the blood type and took a drink. The thick liquid coated his throat and spilled into his stomach, making a warm sensation ripple through his body. There was a flavor he didn't recognize, but from Daniel recalled Damien always played with mixes to make drinks more interesting. The Winslows *were* potion makers.

It took a while to round up his mother and Clay Winslow, Blake's father. They had wandered into a far away wing of the castle. Blake's mother had joked, "They probably haven't taken a breath between them since we arrived, which may not be amazing because Adele is a vampire, but for my husband, it's quite a feat."

Daniel's mother and Clay had always had a great friendship. Now that they were both losing what made them magical beings, they really had something to bond over. Daniel kept that comment to himself, not wanting to bring down the mood.

They hadn't quite made it out of the lounge, when Frances and Ignacio came stumbling into the hall, breathless and flushed. Daniel almost didn't recognize Frances... he had never made that face before. His smile seemed so genuine. Even his eyes sparkled as they looked at Ignacio, who was laughing harder than Daniel had ever seen either.

Alone together made them look different. Daniel could relate.

Maybe Blake was onto something.

He took another sip and pulled on Blake's sleeve. Blake jumped a little but fell back from the crowd to join him in the back. Daniel whispered, "I think we've matched our matchmaker."

"If that can't reverse the curse, I don't know what will," Blake said as if that was his plan all along. "Maybe Ignacio will push back the deadline, if we manage to hook him up with Frances."

"Are we still trying to break the curse?" Daniel asked aloud when he hadn't meant to. The words just flew out of his mouth and he couldn't take them back.

Blake stopped in his tracks, his porcelain complexion burning a nice red color. "I... I thought... I don't... Do you not want to break the curse anymore?"

He asked the exact question that resonated in Daniel's soul.

Before he could answer, Link jumped for joy and waved his arms out. "Holy shit! Is that Frances? What's up?"

"Link! If it isn't the rest of the Winslow clan? I think Christmas has come early this year!" Link barreled into Frances and they shared a stumbling, clumsy hug. They were bursting with things to catch up on, but Ignacio couldn't take a step forward.

Ignacio looked up at Link, his brown eyes as big as dinner plates. "You're... a Winslow?" He clutched his hands close to his chest like a nervous child. It was as if Link were a celebrity and Ignacio didn't know if he could muster up the courage to ask for a picture.

"Uh, yeah?" Link awkwardly let go of Frances, quirking his brow. He glanced back at the group, checking to see if Ignacio was being for real.

"Do you like it?"

"Like what?"

"Being a Winslow? Having magic?"

"Um... yeah? I'm pretty happy about it."

Ignacio smiled, the corner of his eyes glistening with tears. "You're happy? And—" An excitement burst through him. He grabbed Link's arm, "What about your grandparents? Did they enjoy being

witches?"

"I'm pretty sure they did."

"Good. That's so good." Ignacio let out a relieved breath.

The dinner bells chimed, bringing a laugh out of Daniel's fathers. "I think that's our cue. Sorry, sorry," Eitienne waved to a few nervous looking maids. "We're going to be harder to wrangle with all of us together." The party of Winslow and Bellerose families were put back on course to the dining room, but Blake began to break away.

Without thinking, Daniel grabbed his hand. "Wait, where are you going?"

Blake's back straightened as if someone stuck a ruler up his shirt. He looked at Daniel's hand first and then his face. Daniel didn't think it was that weird, but Blake's quizzical look argued something else.

"I'm going to the bathroom first." Blake tilted his head. "Are you okay?"

"I'm great."

Blake hummed, slipping out of Daniel's hold. "Just save me a seat and I'll be there soon."

"It'll be the seat next to me," Daniel promised. He waited for Blake to make his way to Ignacio and ask him for his time. Until the two disappeared around the corner, Daniel didn't move. He glanced at his drink, swirling the little cubes of ice inside before he took another sip.

#

BLAKE

Blake knew Ignacio would join them for dinner and Blake had to know how the ride with Frances went. He sat wedged between the demon that cursed him and the vampire he was still scheduled to wed at the end of the month. Blake glanced at Daniel with the

intention to be subtle, but Daniel was already staring at him.

Blake's face exploded in a blush and he whipped around to face Ignacio.

Something was strange with Daniel.

Blake could tell.

But this strangeness was way too embarrassing for him to investigate. He decided being nosy about Ignacio was safer for his mental health. "So?" Blake nudged him. "How was the ride?"

Daniel tugged on Blake's sleeve. Blake's burning blush crept past his jaw, spilling into his neck and setting over half his body on fire. Blake swatted Daniel's hand away so maybe the wildfire in his veins could finally cool.

"Thrilling!" Ignacio grinned, a spark dancing behind his eyes. He held onto Blake's shoulder as if he could melt into a puddle any moment. "Frances was not lying when he said he road fast. It reminded me that I have a heart with how fast it was beating."

"And Frances?" Blake asked, peering at Frances at the end of the table. He sat with Link to catch up and probably think of ways to tease Blake to death. "Did he say anything?"

"Hm?" Ignacio hummed, caught up in the memory. "No. He didn't say anything. It's too loud for that, even when we were stopped... but he'd look back at me. Just look. Every now and then." He stopped, his breath caught in his throat and he couldn't let it go.

"It definitely sounds like there's a heart in there." Blake seemed to laugh with only himself, seeing as Ignacio was time traveling back to only an hour ago. Blake shook his head and glanced at Daniel, their last conversation replaying in his head. He couldn't help but smile.

At first when he arrived at Sagewick, he assumed it was going to be impossible for them to get along... but Blake felt compelled to Daniel the way bees explored flowers to pollinate. It was a hunger. It felt like being near him was necessary to survival. He smelled

good too.

"So, Daniel? How have things been going between you and Blake —?"

Without a second thought, Blake slid down his chair so he could kick his brother in the knee. Of course, Damien knew it was coming and grabbed Blake's shoe and yanked him further down. No one seemed at all phased by it, but their mother did decide this was a good time to take a drink.

Daniel still answered. "We're doing well, at least I think so."

He looked down at Blake for clarification, but Blake was too busy trying to stop his brother with a few swift kicks. It was never just one question. Never just one innocent question like that. Damien asked, "Were you happy to see Blake after all this time?"

"Of course!" Blake tried to answer, but Daniel cut him off.

"Not really."

"*Danny*," Blake hissed and smacked Daniel's arm.

"What? You weren't happy to see me either."

"But for different reasons and they don't need to know—"

Damien leapt at the opportunity. "What were the reasons?"

"Well..." Daniel thought about it for a moment and Blake's brow narrowed. Something was wrong, Blake could feel his gut warn him. Without asking, Blake grabbed Daniel's chin. It felt as stiff and cold as a windowpane in winter, but Daniel folded to his touch. His eyes weren't as dark as they normally were. In fact... Blake peered closer. There were flecks of green in his eyes.

However, Daniel's attention was on Damien as he explained. "I completely avoided Blake. I was sort of rejecting my responsibility out of my own cowardice. I'm not exactly the romantic type. My mother had to give Blake his engagement ring."

"You don't have to tell them everything!" Blake insisted, smacking Daniel more. Blake glared at Damien, who looked so smug his head might inflate so big and blow up, sitting back in his chair and smirking. Blake's temper flared, scorching the last few threads of his patience.

Clearing her throat, Daniel's mother said, "I think we should switch topics."

"Yes," Blake's father agreed. "They seem to be getting along now, so what does it matter?"

Daniel started nodding and took a sip of his drink before a thought dawned on him and for whatever reason, he just had to share it with the dinner party. "Getting along very well. I almost kissed him today."

Frances snorted into his whine glass and the table was suddenly in a flurry of surprised responses, but Blake drowned them out. He stared at Daniel harder who was ever so subtly tilting back and froth in his chair. It finally dawned on Blake and he could kick himself for not noticing sooner. Blake shot up in his seat and snatched Daniel's glass from him.

"Wow. I never thought I'd see the day." Link blinked. "You guys came a long way. How'd you make up with each other?"

"Link! Shut up!" Blake snapped and sniffed the drink. It smelled vaguely of cinnamon and something with a kick of spice. It made Blake's mouth water. It made Blake want to loosen his lips. The anger that festered in the back of Blake's head was enough for his ears to steam. "Damien! This is low, even for you!"

"What?" Damien was smiling too wide to look at all innocent.

Daniel shrugged. "We just bonded over some music and a little drinking and—"

Blake slapped his hands over Daniel's mouth. "Danny, stop talking. Damien poisoned you with a Truth Potion. It makes you speak the truth but doesn't force you talk or spontaneously start telling the

truth, so just shut up until I can make you an antidote."

"Damien!" Their mother gawked. "You didn't!"

"Really?!" Frances' eyes lit up. He started snapping his fingers to grab his friend's attention. "Daniel! Daniel! Is it really a Sagewick custom to kiss the butt of every horse you meet? And did you really name a whole ass town Somewhere as a joke? Oh—! Conner Hewitt! Conner Hewitt! Did you two really hook up in the conservatory while everyone was taking their exam?"

"I have a headache," Daniel's mother sighed.

"Wait. You got drunk?" Link was still stuck on the subject. "I couldn't even get you to drink in college and you're telling me Blake got you wasted?"

Daniel laughed drunkenly. "He did. Literally. I bit him—"

"OKAY!" Blake shouted. He got up so fast, he kicked his chair back. He yanked Daniel out of his seat, dragging him towards the door. "This is so fun, but we're leaving!" There was a chorus of voices behind them as the boys hurried into hallway, hearing their names called, Blake's mother berating Damien and Frances trying to ask more nosy questions.

Blake huffed, muttering under his breath. He could taste copper he was so angry. Damien would be lucky if Blake ever spoke to him again. "They're all so immature. They get a little inch and decide to immediately take advantage of you. Unlike Frances and my brothers, I don't think it's very funny at all. They wouldn't like it if someone did that to them, you know—"

Blake whipped around to check on Daniel who had suddenly become strangely quiet. Daniel was smiling, which only deepened Blake's frown. "This isn't funny."

"I'm just enjoying myself. You're being unbearably cute."

If Daniel could only speak the truth, Blake wasn't able to speak at all. He just stood there in the middle of the hallway bursting into flames. Blake wasn't sure how he was going to be able to face

anyone, including Daniel after tonight. What's worse was that this potion didn't alter memory. Daniel was going to wake up tomorrow with a terrible headache and a lot of regret.

#

Author's Note

Sorry for the delay! I had to rewrite this chapter so many times. I just couldn't get it right. Sometimes the best thing to do when writing is just to start over. Get ready for the cheese in the next chapter.

Don't forget to leave a comment and tell me what you think! Did you expect Damien to pull off such a stunt? And what did you think of the painfully honest Daniel? Is Blake going to survive all this chaos? And how much more honest do you think Daniel can get? Lol.

If you haven't checked it out, I have another paranormal story circulating called "My Mate, His Mate and Me" between a werewolf, a vampire and a human (?).

24. Daniel

DANIEL

Daniel was unsure what clouded his mind more, whether it was Damien's potion or the handsome witch rifling through Daniel's kitchen cupboards. The moment they stepped into the kitchen, Blake sent the kitchen staff away, promising he'd finish their work in-exchange for some privacy. No one pried or asked why. They happily said goodnight, leaving the boys alone.

With more authority than Daniel had ever seen, Blake directed Daniel to sit and do nothing. Daniel complied, hopping up on the kitchen island while Blake whispered sweet incantations to the mop, the broom, the sponges and rags so they'd get to work. The kitchen worked on its own as all the cleaning supplies bobbed and glided through the air to complete their chores. The magic pulled Daniel back to his childhood as he imagined himself in a fairytale.

Now and then, like when the rags finished drying a plate, its edges would spark incandescent light. Sometimes when the broom caught the edge of a cabinet, a small firework would whizz across the stone floor. It smelled like a crackling fire, and the light kissed his skin with warmth.

It was beautiful... but Daniel couldn't look away from Blake. Blake who furrowed his brow as he grumbled and grabbed what appeared to be nothing but random spices and oils to Daniel, but Blake used great purpose to crush it all into a mortar and pestle. Blissfully, Daniel watched from the kitchen island. Everything had changed when Blake returned.

It all reminded Daniel to never make Blake mad.

Blake must've cast over a thousand curses on his brother by now.

Unable to help himself, Daniel chuckled. Blake's glare snapped up

from underneath his heavy brow. "You seem thrilled for someone who told our entire family that you sucked my blood."

Shaking his head, Daniel explained with a smile glued to his lips, "I don't care what anyone else thinks. I'm happy because you're taking care of me. It makes me wish to be babied by you forever."

Blake shut his eyes and stood straight up, taking a deep breath. "Danny."

"I love it when you say my name like that."

Daniel used a bit of his own magic and enchanted Blake's skin to stain red, a stain that flooded his ears and neck and reminded Daniel of rich wine. It just made it harder for Daniel to stop grinning, but Blake whirled around, turning away from him. Daniel's eyes lingered on the unruly curls on the back of his head, his slender neck and his curved shoulders.

"I wouldn't let anyone besides you call me Danny." Sliding off the counter, Daniel watched Blake stiffen as if reading Daniel's mind.

"You have to stop talking," Blake begged Daniel while his fingers spun over the glass, spinning the ingredients into a whirlpool until the clear liquid turned orange. Blake turned to say more, but the words caught inside his throat. Daniel stepped closer and closer, backing Blake into the counter. Behind Blake, his orange concoction continued to stir on its own.

"I won't." Daniel shook his head. "Because when I tell you this, I don't want you to question if I'm being sincere. I want you to know that when I say that I like you, you know I mean it, or when I say that I'm completely and pathetically smitten by you it's true and when I admit that when I saw you again for the first time that I thought you were the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on, you know that it comes right from my heart."

Blake swallowed nervously. He drew in his lips, his eyes flitting to Daniel's. This close, Daniel heard Blake's heart thrumming like the trill of piano keys. Daniel loved this song.

"And..." Blake murmured. Maybe only a vampire could hear it. "And earlier? When you mentioned almost kissing me, did you mean it? Would you really have kissed me?"

Daniel smiled. Unable to help himself, Daniel brought his hands up to Blake's cheeks, extending his fingers to brush the curls by his ears. That potion did more than bewitch his lips, but it made an honest man out of Daniel's hands. Blake laid his hands on Daniel's waist, holding him in place. Daniel didn't move again. He had spent all evening being honest. Now, it was Blake's turn to make the next move. Taking a deep shuddering breath, Blake's eyes darted around Daniel's face until landing on his lips. A warmth pooled at the pit of Daniel's stomach.

Blake tilted his head, Daniel's hands moving through his hair and brushing his neck. He was so soft, no matter where Daniel touched. Blake rose on his toes and pressed a kiss to Daniel's lips. Everything came to life as if all the darkness in Daniel's life burned away, illuminated into crisp light like a ballroom of chandeliers igniting. Everything made sense and for the first time in a long time, Daniel understood what was going on, he knew what he was doing and things felt right. The kiss relieved him in a strange way, holding Blake inside his hands.

With his body humming, Daniel kissed Blake again, opening his mouth and letting himself devour the witch's lips. The bitterness of wine lingered in Blake's kiss and warmed Daniel's body as if he had drank the entire bottle himself as if he had laid in the sun for hours without burning as if he was a human man burned by the touch of his lover.

And yet, close wasn't close enough. Daniel hoisted Blake onto the counter and Blake responded by wrapping his arms around Daniel's neck, running his hand up the back of his head. Daniel wanted to crawl inside of Blake's body and huddle there for warmth. He ran his hands up Blake's thighs, making the witch squirm. He never wanted to let go.

Blake broke the kiss to catch his breath, resting his forehead on Daniel's shoulder with his hands still on Daniel's neck. Daniel kissed his head and rubbed his back as Blake trembled. "My entire life..."

Blake said, his voice shaking. "I've never been able to make my own choices." He looked up, meeting Daniel's eyes. "But I'm making the choice to love you, to choose you."

"Thank you," Daniel said, never feeling more grateful in his entire life. "You won't regret it. I won't let you."

Blake smiled a little, his eyes shining with the promise of tears. Daniel held his face, pressing a kiss to Blake's forehead, his nose, his chin and then his lips. It was slow and soft as gentle as a silk gliding across his skin. Daniel wanted to treat Blake like that kiss, like something so precious.

"Drink the antidote," Blake whispered.

"In a second." Daniel hummed, dragging his nose down Blake's neck. He loved being so close to Blake's heartbeat. Blake held his breath as Daniel pecked his neck. It made Daniel chuckle.

Blake whacked his shoulder. "I mean it."

"Okay, okay..." Daniel lifted himself up with some effort, but he kept his hand on Blake's thigh. He didn't want to let go, to stop touching him for a moment now that he could. Blake slid his hand across his, interlocking their fingers together. Daniel rubbed his thumb along Blake's skin. He grabbed the orange drink and brought it to his lips.

"Make sure you drink it in one go," Blake instructed.

Daniel smirked. It was so easy for Blake to tell him what to do, and honestly, Daniel loved it. Just as instructed, Daniel threw his head back and chugged the potion. It tasted spicier than Daniel assumed, like a stronger apple cider vinegar infused with cinnamon, but as soon as the last drop fell into his stomach, the world pressed down on his body. He went slack, using Blake to keep standing. He let out a long, tired sigh.

"Time for bed," Blake whispered, patting Daniel's head. He slipped off the counter and put Daniel's arm around his shoulder, but Daniel used all of his strength to keep from having to lean into Blake and

taking him down. They passed the dancing broom and mop on the way out. The dining room was silent and they were the only two people roaming the halls, other than the ghosts.

They didn't speak on the way to Daniel's room, but they didn't need words. Daniel caught Blake staring at him, which made Daniel smile and Blake blush. Blake bit down a smile, practically bubbling over with joy, and stared at the ground. Daniel continued to stare. If Daniel from when he was a kid saw himself now, he wouldn't believe it... but he would be jealous, Daniel thought.

Daniel opened his door but grabbed Blake's hand before he could escape. He pulled on Blake's arm and begged, "Come stay with me."

Blake smiled, but didn't take his hand back. "I can't."

"You *can*. Choose to stay with me," Daniel used Blake's words against him and Blake just nervously laughed and was flushed again.

"I can't. I have to make sure the kitchen goes to sleep too or they'll run rampant."

"Let them clean the entire castle. Sleep with me." He brought Blake's palm to his lips and rested his cheek there. "Please?"

Blake shook his head and grabbed Daniel's face. "*I can't*. I want to say goodnight to my parents and talk to Iggy, and I need to shower and clean my room after Damien destroyed it and—"

"What's wrong? Do you not want to go to sleep?" As Daniel asked it, he realized what was going on.

Blake took back his hand. "I'm worried that I'll have nightmares again."

Daniel used his door to help him lean forward and kiss Blake's cheek. "Then why don't you dream of me?"

Letting Blake go, Daniel watched the witch walk down the hallway. He glanced back as if he was being sneaky, but quickly looked forward again after meeting Daniel's eyes. It made Daniel laugh and

yet; it sounded sadder than expected. Daniel wished they could be together longer. When Blake disappeared, something was out of place. There was a worry deep inside of him that he had lost something and he didn't know where to find it.

It didn't take long for Daniel to go to sleep, lulled by the magic of Blake's potion and his lips. His dreams were just as sweet, and Daniel prayed Blake could have the same.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It's been a minute, huh? Haha. I've been working on other projects, one being a Middle Grade, so I've been reading nothing but MG to be in that headspace. Which! Makes it so hard to write adult, haha. But I was so inspired today and just wanted to write Til Death. I've missed my boys! Hopefully another chapter really soon!

Next chapter is a dream chapter ;) Get ready to see Henry again!

We got a kiss!! Oh my gosh! We haven't had a kiss since Henry and Nicholas kissed chapter 12. I actually didn't even plan for them to kiss here, but sometimes my characters are like WE HAVE TO KISS RIGHT NOW OR WE'LL DIE. Lol. I think it was like that in Somewhere too. In Going Rogue Jess and Drew were together from the beginning so they just kissed whenever. Only in The Golden Rule they kissed according to plan. I just like writing kisses >.<

That was a kiss tangent. Lol.

Let me know what you guys think! What did you think about the magic cleaning supplies? And what did you think about Blake and Daniel's confessions? And then, what did you think of the ending? Do you think Blake's will have nightmares or sweet dreams?

If you like this book, check out my other books! I have 3 completed~

25. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

I opened my eyes, slightly confused, a nervous ache churning in the pit of my stomach. Looking around, I wasn't in my bedroom. No. I was in Henry's room, in Henry's bed. Something that felt like a fist pounded against my skull and I groaned, forced to close my eyes again. I curled into my bedsheets and my pillow. I never felt so tired. The exhaustion seeped into my bones and my eyes burned, making me eager to cry. I wanted to scream. I wanted to tear apart these sheets.

"Headache?" Someone asked.

I jumped, a gasp on my lips as I looked up to find Ignacio. Dressed in his fine leathers and silk flowing blouse, Ignacio sat in my bed, still in his boots and wearing all of his jewelry. He had the same tired look and dark bags under his eyes. Red skin and purple bags.

He said, "I brought you up some food. The staff are beginning to worry, Henry."

Right.

I hadn't left my room in a month. Not since Edward left on business again. This time, he made sure I wouldn't want to leave the house. Not unless I wanted everyone to see the bruises and the welts. Not unless I wanted to break my younger sibling's heart. Not unless I wanted to explain what happened to Nicolas...

Tears welled up in my eyes. I hadn't seen Nicolas in over a month. I clutched my sheets and closed my eyes, fighting back the memories. The pain had never left my skin. The devastation lingered in my chest and the moment of my greatest sorrow never ceased. I wondered if I was ever going to stop feeling like this.

"Edward sent a gift," Ignacio said and motioned to a box at the foot of

the bed.

A horrible laugh flew out of my mouth. "He must feel a speck of guilt this time. That's the third one. Just put it away."

"You don't want to open it?"

"I don't need to open it. I know what it is..." I extended my foot and kicked the bottom of the box until it flipped off the bed and out of my sight. The anger in me rising to the top of my head and making my face burn. "It's some other horrible red costume. It's always red. Edward's signature color... and I hate it."

Edward's favorite color consumed me from the bed sheets, the curtains, the cushions and even the walls were the color red. Maybe that was why Edward liked to hit me. My skin reddened so easily, even with the briefest amount of pressure. Not that Edward did anything gently.

"My apologies," Ignacio said, his voice small.

It made me look at him. He had his hands in his lap, rubbing them nervously together. I had never seen him so unsure before. "It's not your doing... I'm happy you came to see me." That was the truth. "I didn't realize I was so starved for company."

"Well... I wanted to pay you back for your gift."

"Ignacio!" I smiled, and my cheeks ached from the lack of practice. "You're here to read to me?"

"No. Like I said, all my trades must be equal. No mortal has ever given me a gift before, so I wanted to give you something no mortal should have."

"That sounds exciting."

The sleeping butterflies in my chest awoken and fluttered all around, stretching their wings. I sat up, wincing at the pain still in my side. "Go on," I encouraged him.

"Remember what I told you? I'm a demon."

"I remember."

"But there's more in this world than demons and humans. There're all kinds of creatures that are real, including witches."

I nodded to show him I was following along, although I didn't quite understand where this was going. He continued, "Most people don't know this, but there's a little magic in everyone. Witches are just more sensitive to it. Think of it as a language you don't understand..." Ignacio snapped his fingers and a brilliant sparkle exploded from his fingers. It was as bright as fire, but without the bite. I nearly leaped out of bed.

"How did you do that?!" I asked with more excitement than I knew what to do with. Grabbing his arm, I hung off of Ignacio and stared wide-eyed at his hands. "Do it again."

Ignacio smiled and snapped again, igniting a flurry of crackling light.

I squeezed his arm.

"Would you... would you like to learn how to do this?"

"Can I?" I asked in disbelief. He might as well have asked me if I wanted to open that window and fly away. What I wouldn't give... What I wouldn't do... Sitting up, I snuggled up next to him and his warm body and insisted, "Show me."

"Hold out your hands." Ignacio smiled and crawled to the end of the bed, raising to his knees. I mirrored him, holding out my hands and anticipating every single velvet word. "Find the life deep inside of you. Find the string connecting your heart to your soul. Hold a shred of happiness and let it build, let it burst from your fingertips."

I looked down at my empty hands.

I've never created a thing with these hands. Never contributed anything good to this world... but I've touched many good things. I thought about running my hand through my baby brother, Thomas' hair. I remembered wiping the tears away from the kitchen girl, Mary's cheek. I had the lines of Nicholas' hands memorized. The first day that we met, and we shook hands, there were sparks then too. A fire started by Nicholas' bright smile.

A small golden spark jumped out of my palm and I gasped, pulling it back out of instinct. My laugh came out half afraid and half elated. Ignacio matched my smile, grinning wider than ever before, a rare appearance like the tail end of a rainbow.

We spent all afternoon making my dark, sad and red room bright with starlight glittering right from our fingertips. Ignacio chased me around, grabbing for me. When he snatched me, he mercilessly tickled my sides, and I screamed, falling into the bed.

"I give! I give!" I begged for relief.

Ignacio laughed and jumped back on the bed, making our too happily exhausted bodies bob up and down. My cheeks ached from smiling, my smile just growing wider as I admire the happiness bursting from the demon beside me. It was new and thrilling, and I could spend forever locked inside this room with my friend.

"I hope this isn't rude, but..." I said, almost losing my nerve. My resolve strengthened when I looked into Ignacio's eyes and saw only gentleness. "Can I call you Iggy?"

"Of course you can."

#

With a start, Blake jolted out of his dream.

And yet, he still felt like he was dreaming. Blake tried rubbing the delusion out of his eyes, an uneasiness wrapped all around him that he couldn't shake. Restless, Blake threw off his covers and sat on the edge of his bed. He held up his hands and stared at the lines on his palms, still hearing Ignacio's voice echoing in his ears.

Find the string connecting your heart to your soul. Hold a shred of happiness and let it build, let it burst from your fingertips.

That was what he said.

Sparks whizzed out of Blake's fingers, blinding him in the dead of night. Thoughts whirled around his head like a storm on a path of destruction. He tried thinking back to the morning he reconnected

with Ignacio... That demon chose his words carefully and Blake didn't notice it.

Blake heard the truth in whispers before, but now it was all screaming in his ears. Making him insane.

"Blake?" Ignacio appeared in a puff of red smoke. He was a demon again with his horns, red skin and golden eyes, but he cocked his head like a curious cat. "What's wrong?"

The words left Blake's lips as they came to mind. "I'm just remembering what you said to us after we summoned you..." Blake stood, walking deeper into his room. Maybe he needed to stand in the exact place where Ignacio spoke to them for the first time. "It was your wording. It's sticking out to me now. You said you saved Nicholas."

"I said I saved his ancestor," Ignacio said, unable to hide the tension in his voice.

Blake's brow lowered, picking apart the words. The truth sat huddled in a dark corner of Blake's mind. Slowly, he was lighting the way to reveal it. "You said you gave my family power... Henry wasn't the first witch in my family, was he? It was his brother..." The name floated to the surface from a long lost memory. "Thomas. Thomas Winslow was the first witch in the family, wasn't he?"

"He was."

"Not Henry."

They stared at each other for a moment.

Ignacio unflinching.

Blake was shaking, and he didn't know if he just started crying or he had been crying and he wasn't sure if he was in pain because of Henry or if the truth just hurts. Blake could hardly get the words out as his throat closed up to the width of a needle. "Edward killed us, didn't he? But you could only save Nicholas. Edward killed Henry for good."

Making himself smaller, Ignacio shook his head. "That's not what you want to know."

"But I do!" Blake lashed out, an anger he didn't recognize building inside of him. The lines between Henry and Blake faded in and out, and Blake wasn't sure if he ever existed.

"No. Ask me what you really want to know..."

"Am I Henry?" The tears were getting bigger and his nose was running. Stumbling forward, Blake grabbed onto Ignacio's arms to keep from falling to pieces. "Did Edward kill me?"

"No," Ignacio insisted, holding onto Blake. "You're not Henry. You're Blake Winslow."

"You know what I mean."

Ignacio swallowed and took a deep breath. He dropped his head, giving it a little shake. Finally, when he lifted his eyes to meet Blake's, Ignacio spoke with so much authority Blake would've believed anything he said. "Five hundred years ago, you were Henry Winslow and Daniel was Nicholas Bellerose."

"This whole thing. This entire agreement was so Nicholas and I could be together again."

"Yes."

"Why did we have to wait five hundred years—?" But then Blake knew. He asked, "Was it Edward? Something about your deal with Edward? What deal did you make with Edward five hundred years ago? There's no way he's back, right? It's just about Nicholas and me, right? No." Blake was spacing out, losing himself. "He'll find a way to stop the wedding, Iggy. He would never let me be happy. He'll never leave me alone. Iggy—"

Iggy waved his hand in front of Blake's teary eyes and he saw stars. Stars, just like sparks. The mix of all Blake's emotions and his stress and the adrenaline shaking his core melted away. Blake lost the strength in his legs, collapsing into Ignacio's arms. Humming, Ignacio swept Blake off the ground and held him securely in his

arms. Just like he'd been doing the last five hundred years and even longer before that.

#

DANIEL

A knock on his bedroom door gave Daniel pause. Groggily, Daniel rubbed his eyes and turned over to lie on his back. "Hello? Who is it?"

"It's only me," Ignacio said from the other side.

Sighing, Daniel forced himself out of bed. He opened the door, wondering why he didn't just teleport like he usually did. But before he could ask, Daniel saw the answer sleeping soundly in Ignacio's arms. Without asking, Daniel reached for Blake.

Ignacio traded off the witch with a sad smile. "He hasn't been sleeping well."

Daniel nodded. "Another nightmare?"

"Perhaps... I believe he's just stressed and I think he can find some comfort being by your side."

"You think?" Daniel wondered that himself. Glancing at Blake as he tried snuggling closer to Daniel's chest. His brow furrowing, Daniel noticed his red face and tear-streaked cheeks. He felt strangely cold. "Is it truly just about a dream?" Daniel asked, but when he looked up, Ignacio had already vanished.

#

Author's Note

Hello friends! I hope everyone's having a good week so far. Who expected a more serious tone after such a cheesy chapter? Everyone? Gosh. Y'all know me so well. Lol.

Don't forget to leave your thoughts in the comments! Are you surprised Blake figured it out that he's reincarnated? Or are you

thinking it's about time? Haha. Does this change things now that Blake knows? Do you think he should tell Daniel?

All comments are appreciated!

And if you like this book, check out my other works!

26. Blake

BLAKE

The bags underneath Ignacio's eyes had lightened and his laughter had begun echoing through these empty halls. Watching him reminded me how to do it. I sat at the end of my bed, wrapped up in my sheets and watched in awe as Ignacio recited a novel, changing his voice to suit different characters and sometimes impersonated the characters like he was really putting on a play. For so long, I was a baby bird with broken wings and now, I could feel them flutter.

"And that concludes chapter three!" Ignacio announced and as he bent over in a grandiose bow, I clapped with the thunder of a full crowd. I shot off little sparks from my fingers to add to the effect. Just the way Ignacio had taught me.

"Thank you, thank you. I'll be here until the end of time." Ignacio bowed again.

"Can you read the next chapter?"

"Yes, but I promised Myrtle that I'd get you to eat a full plate."

"I will!" I grabbed the brass tray of beef stew and crunchy bread with butter. Grinning, my eyes grew wide with excitement as I insisted, "I'll even have seconds!"

Ignacio laughed again and I brightened at the playful sound.

Then, there was a knock at my window and I held my breath, holding it still inside my chest. Carefully, I sat down my tray and prayed they'd just go away if we didn't make a sound. But Ignacio cocked his head as a man on the other side whispered, "Henry? Are you there?"

My blood ran cold while Ignacio took a step towards the sound the way cats do hearing mice squeak. Throwing off my sheets, I grabbed Ignacio's arms. I couldn't hide the panic in my whisper. "You have to leave this

instant."

"What? Who is that—"

"No one. Pretend you didn't hear anything."

Ignacio dusted off his old somber expression, putting it back on like a well-worn coat. "I can't... I can't lie to Edward."

I squeezed his arms. "It's not a lie if you never tell him. If it's never brought up. If he asks if someone came to see me, it's not a lie if you say you were my visitor."

"Henry, I don't—"

"Henry? I'm already sick to death with worry and not hearing your answer will drive me insane. I shall break down this door if I have to." Nicholas called from the door, his voice booming. That sound nearly brought me to tears as it resonated deeper than my bones. Down to my very soul. Nicholas.

"Please, Iggy go," I begged. "Don't tell Edward."

Ignacio's eyes stayed trained on my balcony, but he still vanished from my hands in a puff of red smoke. I whispered to the air, "Thank you."

"Here I go!" Nicholas warned again and I jumped to attention.

"Don't! Don't!" I shouted, running to my balcony door and throwing the curtains to the side.

My heart jumped up into my throat, cutting my air off. The light of the outside blinded me for a moment, but when my eyes adjusted and the world settled around me, I looked up at my own personal sunshine after centuries of a cloudy winter. Somehow, Nicholas was more beautiful than I remembered. He pressed his hands against the glass, tense all over. I worried if I knocked him with the door, he might shatter and I'd lose him again.

The second I opened the door, Nicholas pushed inside and threw his arms around me with so much force, we both stumbled into the middle of the room. He picked me off the ground, putting me on my toes as he

breathed me in. "I was going mad without you. Ask anyone in the village. They were quite ready to run me out." He took a deep breath of me again, holding my body even tighter.

I couldn't answer as I tried holding back my tears. My misery bubbled up and pressed against my face. All the restlessness pent up inside of me finally gave way and I let Nicholas hold me up, let him take all of my weight. It was a moment of relief I thought I'd never have again.

"When you didn't come to the ball, I figured Edward had something to do with it. I waited for you, but then days and weeks went by and no one had seen you." Nicholas gathered himself, his voice growing steadier. He tried to pull away, but I held on with fistfuls of his coat. I didn't want him to move. I needed him to stay in my arms. And yet, he still wasn't close enough.

"I heard Edward had left, but still the silence between us let my mind wander to darker corners than I care to venture ever again."

"If it were up to me..." I whispered, running my hands across the lines of Nicholas' body, reminding myself he existed. "You'd never leave my side."

"If it were up to me, I never would."

Nicholas slid his hands out from under me to hold onto my cheeks. I closed my eyes ready for the kiss of my life, but his lips never found purchase. Peering up, I met Nicholas' scowl. His eyes had clouded over with the kind of thunderstorm that sunk ships and ripped trees right from the ground.

I had forgotten after all that time I was distracted by Ignacio's magic that Edward left me with one parting gift. A black eye. The swelling had recently subsided, but still tender to the touch. It seemed to be a long lasting present that could be passed around. It's what Edward did. He was quite giving with his misery.

"I'm going to kill him," Nicholas bellowed.

"You won't," I snapped.

"He can't get away with this."

"I don't want to talk about it. I don't want Edward in this room when you're here." My brow furrowing, I grabbed Nicholas face so he locked eyes with mine. I wanted to narrow his vision to pinpoint to my soul. "I just want to be with you. Let me forget everything outside and be with you. Please..." I kissed him once but stayed close to his lips with the promise of more. Much more. "Nicholas, I need you."

"I can't leave when you're not safe."

"I'm not telling you to leave." Wrapping my arms around his neck, I whispered, "I'm begging you to stay."

I closed the space between us and took a deep breath, feeling the warmth of life burn through my veins again. Kissing Nicholas restarted my heart and I could feel it rage, feel the pulse and the way I blushed from my neck to the curve of my shoulders, the same warmth pooling in my chest. Nicholas held me in return, tighter than even before.

Secure enough to keep me grounded.

Gentle enough to avoid breaking me.

Reaching down, Nicholas grabbed the back of my thighs and hiked me up. Instinctively, I wrapped my legs around his waist. He walked us towards the bed and when I fell, he fell with me. I didn't unwrap my legs, clinging to Nicholas' body like it was the only fire in a cold desolate world. He buried his head in-between my neck and kissed my pounding heartbeat.

"I love you," was all he had to whisper to make my skin tingle and my toes curl.

I erased everything wrong about this room.

Throwing our clothes all over the place, covering the floor with Nicholas' clothes and his memory. I dragged him all across my room and desecrated every inch of it. Nicholas reminded me how to smile and how to laugh as he nibbled the inside of my thigh. I'd squeal into a gasp as his touch deepened, reminding me how well he knew me.

His touch was like the homecoming I so desperately yearned for as he welcomed me with open arms and I let him burrow into my body and

find home. We created a burning hearth in this room that inspired ecstasy within me. We fit together like a matching set, like I was made to love Nicholas Bellerose. Every time we were parted, a piece of me had been exiled and I wasn't whole until he kissed me like this. Kissed me like it could be the last.

Like he was made to love me too.

#

BLAKE

Blake jumped, jolting out of his dream and found himself face to face with Daniel. His eyes widened as his face erupted in the hottest blush of his life. Daniel snorted. "You okay?"

"I- I- I um—" Blake stammered, his skin laced with sweat. He could still somehow feel the press of Nicholas' lips and the nip of his teeth against his neck, his chest and between his legs. The memory was enough to make Blake squirm.

Fuck.

"Do you feel sick?" Daniel asked and pressed the back of his cool hand to Blake's forehead. "Iggy said you weren't feeling well." Leaning closer, Daniel tried examining Blake's eyes, but all Blake could do was press himself deeper into the mattress and hope to disappear.

Curling his hands around the edge of his bed sheet, Blake yanked the expensive silk over his face. "I'm fine. Just going to try to sleep in a little longer."

With a chuckle, Daniel slipped a finger around the edge of the sheet, fighting Blake to pull it down. "You don't sound fine."

"I'm fine. Totally fine," Blake managed to say aloud while mouthing as many expletives as he could remember. That wasn't like any dream he had before... but were they even dreams? They were memories. *His* memories of being Henry five hundred years ago banging his super hot lover.

In that moment, he remembered something about Henry challenging just what Nicholas' hands were good for and Blake burned to a crisp now knowing the answer.

Daniel tugged the sheet again. He was showing great restraint not using his vampire strength to rip it all the way down. "I don't need to feed you your own truth potion, do I?"

"Nope. Not at all."

"And you're not..." His voice softened to the purr of a kitten. "You're not regretting what happened last night?"

Blake popped up, dangerously close to knocking into Daniel's head. Luckily, Daniel's reflexives were spot on as usual and he managed to dodge. If guilt could be in the form of a weapon, a hole would be through Blake's chest and he'd be bleeding out. Daniel looked like a wounded animal, stuck inside a bear trap of Blake's creation.

"I don't regret a thing," Blake whispered, taking Daniel's hand and intertwining their fingers. "I should be asking *you* that..."

"Me?"

"Yeah, you were under the influence of a truth potion and you were vulnerable and I still..." Blake's mind tripped and fell into the vast depths of Daniel's dark brown eyes. "Still..."

Daniel must've learned to read minds because he saw right through Blake's drooling expression and smiled, before bringing his lips closer. Daniel kissed him, which was answer enough, but Daniel spoke anyways. That was fine by Blake. He liked listening to Daniel talk.

"I would've probably kissed you eventually. You obviously don't realize this, Blake Winslow, but you are very kissable. Kissing you has been on my mind for quite a while."

Blake bit his offending lips that Daniel was just *staring* at.

Heat bubbled from Blake's stomach, rising and encasing his body with hot lava like heat. He was melted and changed and found

himself staring back at Daniel's lips. Taking a deep breath, Blake cupped Daniel's face, touching that strong jawline that Blake always had imagined could cut glass. And in Blake's hand, Daniel's skin was cool, but Daniel Bellerose was very much alive.

He kissed Daniel, kissing him deeper and enjoying the feeling of Daniel's mouth brushing against his and feeling the way this vampire actually shuddered as if shaking off all dignity and grace, succumbing totally to Blake's hand and the way he grabbed Daniel's collar and pulled him. Obediently, Daniel climbed onto the bed, kissing Blake into the comforter, until he was lying flat again and doing things with his tongue that turned Blake's bones into jelly.

This kiss wasn't like their first in the kitchen.

This kiss, Blake now understood every kiss will have been five hundred years in the making. And these kisses tasted like it. They were so natural, they had become a thing of tradition between the two men. Blake had always wanted kisses to be like this, but so many had failed short. Blake made a sound he didn't recognize, vibrating from his own throat. Maybe from Henry.

"Stay here," Blake heard himself begging.

"Don't tempt me," Daniel said as Blake explored the length of his neck and his Adam's apple bobbing up and down. The last thing Blake wanted was for Daniel to leave his side. More importantly, being alone sounded like Blake's worst nightmare, worse than another unwanted dream.

Daniel's hands intertwined with Blake's and pressed his hands against the silky mattress covers. It was like he needed to push Blake back to keep himself away. Daniel shook his head. "I have to go."

Unable to help himself, Blake laughed and bit his lip. "You can't stay another second? Just one more second."

Shaking his head, Daniel still folded as easy as paper and brought his lips back to where they belonged. Blake struggled, annoyed that he couldn't use his hands to pull Daniel closer. Everything inside of

Blake told him to grab Daniel and never let him go. Never again.

"Okay—"

"One more second," Blake interrupted.

"Blake."

"*One more*."

Blake slipped out of Daniel's hold and wrapped his arms around Daniel's neck. This was his first and officially longest make-out session Blake ever had and he honestly never wanted it to end. He was still hungry. Still thirsting for more.

"Blake."

"Another second," Blake insisted, but Daniel didn't yield to him.

Daniel tilted his head around Blake's neck, pressing cold kisses to his skin and sending shivers up and down his arms. He whispered between pecks, "Either I leave and let you relax for the rest of the morning in peace or Michael storms in here and drags me out by the scruff of my neck."

"There's not a third option?"

"Love, I wish there was."

Blake sucked on his throbbing bottom lip, keeping any further comment to himself. If he pointed out the pet name, he doubted Daniel would ever call him that again and Blake wanted Daniel to call him that all the time. Slipping through Blake's hands, Daniel stood from the bed and adjusted his dress shirt to look tidy again, while Blake curled himself around the warm sheets and sighed wistfully. He could look at Daniel all day, like he was one of the other paintings hanging up in the Louvre.

"I'll send brunch up," Daniel promised as he pulled a sweater over his head. "A huge spread. Every little thing you could ever want. Pastries, bacon, coffee—"

"*Stop* flirting with me or I'll lock you in this room forever."

This made Daniel grin and his eyes all sparkly, maybe even tempted to return to Blake's arms. Yet, the vampire stayed strong and dragged himself to the door. Blake through his arms out and suddenly remembered something. He perked up. "Oh! And if you see Iggy, tell him that I'd mad at him and he better come talk to me or else."

Daniel gave him a withering look. "I think I'll skip the part where you're cross and just tell him to come find you."

"No. I want him to know."

"If you say so, Love."

Blake laughed, reaching for one of Daniel's dozens of pillows, and chucked it at the door. "Enough! You're just torturing me now! Go already!"

The great prince of the Bellerose coven, the vampire extraordinaire gifted with the power from a 500 year old deal with a powerful demon, Daniel giggled and escaped into the hallway. Blake dropped back into the mattress, holding his cheeks. He couldn't stop smiling, even giggling himself as he remembered the last few minutes.

He whispered into Daniel's bed sheets, "I'm so lucky to have been born again."

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hello friends! It's been some time, but I have moved in my new home and I have acquired internet! I was able to move in fine... however, we weren't able to get internet for almost two weeks. I basically drained my data and did a lot of nesting.

This chapter is basically what I wrote while I tried relaxing... so it's obviously very fluffy. Lol. I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Henry and Nicholas are finally together again! And it's the first time Iggy has "met" Nicholas too. But now Iggy seems to be avoiding Blake,

haha. Blake is feeling better this morning. Must be nice to wake up next to a prince.

Please let me know what you think! All comments are appreciated! Are you enjoying the holidays? Technically, this is around the time the events in the book are happening~ I love my Hallmark Christmas book with magic and vampires, haha

27. Daniel

DANIEL

Usually, as a vampire, Daniel could feel as heavy as marble, as unyielding as ice, but this morning he walked on air, gliding over the marble and ancient runners. Daniel imagined he'd never touch the ground again. During his entire young adult life, Daniel watched with great amusement as boys threw themselves at the feet of the oblivious Blake Winslow and now, he was the one who surfaced as the victor. He was the last man standing.

Daniel was never so happy to be wrong about someone.

And he was very wrong indeed.

"Daniel!"

Damien appeared like a jump scare around the corner. He had flung himself out of his bedroom, still wearing his silk pajamas and his long hair was half out of its bun, curling around his shoulders. Unlike the usual movie serial killer, Damien didn't come armed with a gun or a stake. He only threatened Daniel's good time. Attempting to avoid his brother-in-law, Daniel moved to turn around when Damien plopped to the ground, reaching for Daniel's ankles.

His smile dropping, Daniel's eyes flashed red as he dashed out of Damien's reach, faster than what the mortal eye can perceive, which caused Damien to slip forward and land on his face.

Lowering to his hind legs, Daniel wagged his finger at Damien. It was amazing that Damien was a few years older. "You really need a hobby that doesn't involve your siblings."

If Damien heard him, he didn't show it as his eyes stayed trained on Daniel's ankles. He slumped, genuinely disappointed. "You're

walking totally normal."

Standing tall, Daniel crossed his arms. "I'm afraid to ask, but is there a reason why I wouldn't be walking normally?"

As he approached, Damien's brow narrowed. He sat his hands on his hips, seemingly frustrated by what wasn't there. Only focusing on Daniel's ankles, he muttered, "I could've sworn my ward went off last night."

"A ward?"

"Of course. I put one in front of Blake's door so if someone walked through, it'd burn their ankles."

"You set a fire off in the palace?"

"Of course not. I'm not crazy—"

"That is highly debatable."

"It was just a small burst of light. Enough to singe a vampire."

"You know, for threatening the crown, I could have you thrown in prison."

Damien's purple eyes, the same eyes as the rest of the Winslow clan, snapped up. His brows were scrunched in confusion and hurt. "What? But we're family."

Throwing his hands up in defeat, Daniel decided to walk away because Damien was unfortunately right. They were going to be family and Blake would probably kill him for killing his brother. This wasn't the old world either and Daniel couldn't set a bounty on Damien's head for the coven to tear him apart... but maybe for his birthday. Daniel was just going to have to hope that he could whittle Damien's judgement away with time.

Maybe when Damien finally realized how Daniel would do absolutely anything for Blake. That there wasn't another man in this world that would take care of Blake as well as he could... though Damien was pretty insufferable. He'd have to ask Frances'

matchmaking friend to set him up. Someone else needed to consume Damien's thoughts.

But this did remind Daniel.

On a new mission, Daniel searched the guest wing for a particular Winslow. Turning up empty, he passed through the kitchen and dining room, greeting the staff when he turned up empty again. This castle was teeming with the Winslow family and he couldn't find one, especially not the one he wanted. Close to admitting defeat, Daniel climbed the west wing steps, when he finally heard that familiar voice.

Blake's father, Clay Winslow was in the middle of a conversation with a few of the maids. He seemed to have taken two of their laundry bags, lugging them as they walked together. Grey was peppered through his black locks and his round glasses covered half of his face.

"I've never been a fan of magical romancing methods. It's messy business," Clay explained and the girls were flushed and giggly. They must've asked him about love potions, which were one of the only potions the Winslow family didn't sell. "But then again when I was your age, I was more interested in my studies than romance. My now wife, Emma—have you met her? She's wonderful—*Anyway!* She had to inform me that we were dating. I hadn't realized we had been going on dates until she kissed me goodnight. I'd be lost without her—*Oh!* Daniel!"

By his name, the maids dropped into a curtsy and bowed their heads. Daniel smiled. "Good morning. As you were girls."

They nodded, one grabbing the bag of laundry from Clay, who waved them goodbye. When they were alone, Clay fell into step with Daniel. "So, how are you this morning? Are you feeling any better?"

Quirking his head, Daniel wasn't sure what he meant until he unfortunately recalled how much of an ass he had made out of himself last night. "Mr. Winslow, I do apologize about last night."

Clay waved the apology away. "Don't be silly. My family should be apologizing to you. I'd say Damien was remorseful, but we both know that's not quite true." He made himself laugh and even Daniel smiled a little. They walked together down the steps, passing the towering windows and old family portraits. Someone had even spun gold tinsel and garland around the railings, Christmas lights twinkling between the green needles and mini pinecones.

"But still," Daniel insisted, folding his hands behind his back. "I don't want you to think I'm not taking this engagement seriously. I plan to take very good care of Blake, sir. I just want to make him happy —"

With a laugh, Clay waved his hands as if brushing off the concern. "Oh, I've never worried about it as much as the others—*Oops!*" He covered his mouth, only letting one snort escape. This was a man that never waited for his mind to filter his words. He was so disarmed and opened, Daniel imagined he could learn every single one of his secrets if they spent the rest of the afternoon together.

It was why Daniel loved him so much as a kid. He never made Daniel feel lied to or tricked.

Clay asked, "Don't tell anyone I told you that. I promise they only hold a normal amount of nerves. The wedding is only a week away."

"Your secret is safe with me but... what makes you so sure about me? About us? Blake and I didn't get along well growing up."

"Daniel Gabriel Bellerose, you are speaking with a man that believes in fate."

Daniel could've sworn he saw Clay's purple eyes twinkle. Shaking his head, Daniel fell a step behind Clay as he laughed. "Fate? Do you really think a deal between a demon is fate? Sounds like this whole thing was set in motion on purpose. This was orchestrated by our ancestors and even scheduled."

"At first glance..." Clay nodded and put his arm around Daniel's shoulders, bringing him in like they were sharing more secrets. "An

outside observer would say, I think but I have known you since you were a little boy." His smile brightened, knowingly and maybe even a little wickedly. "Do you remember that you were always the first one to greet us when we arrived at the castle? I've asked how you always knew when we arrived, but you would just shrug and say you just knew... Except once, Blake and Emma came a day late. You didn't greet me and the boys, but you did greet Blake the next day."

"I don't..." Daniel's brow narrowed, muttering "or maybe I do..."

"I bet you also don't remember that when you were very small, the sound of Blake crying would make you cry. We had to house Blake on the other side of the castle, so you could get some sleep. Though, sometimes you were the only one that could get him to stop."

Daniel thought hard, recalling the way he could sense the moment the Winslow family passed through the gates to the Sagewick castle, the way he could tell Blake was upset before anyone else. There was a time Blake had gotten lost in the thousands of corridors, the thousands of rooms and hadn't been seen for hours.

Daniel had followed his instincts and almost found Blake immediately.

Soon after that, Daniel noticed the way Link and other boys, his friends teased Blake, so he started pretending he didn't care about how Blake felt anymore. He decided getting like by his brothers was way cooler because being cool was suddenly so important to him. His stomach twisted at the memory, hit by a gross amount of embarrassment. He'd be kicking himself the rest of his life, Daniel imagined.

"But there could be plenty of reasons for that..." Clay let Daniel go, walking the rest of the way down to the grand foyer. His voice echoed, bouncing all around these tall ceilings. He raised his hands as he shrugged. "I like to look at the present as much as everyone else. You two met again, became friends and from what I can tell things are going well. Are they going well?"

Clay turned with a smile.

Daniel nodded. "Very well. I'm..." Taking a deep breath, Daniel rolled his shoulders back and let his nerves fizzle out. "I'm excited to marry to your son."

Clay smiled wider. "All pretty convenient to not be fate. You two had to get married. Nobody said you had to fall in love." Laughing again, Clay sounded like he was congratulating himself with a very funny joke. "But I'm sorry, we got a little off track. You wanted to speak to me about something, right? I'm headed to town to buy some last minute Christmas gifts, would you like to join me?"

"Oh, uh I wish I could, but I can't. This won't take long," Daniel promised and caught back up. "Mr. Winslow—"

"Please call me Clay, I haven't called you your highness- well, ever!" Clay laughed again. Like he was comfortable in his own home, Clay walked right to a large portrait of an old family dog and opened it like it was a door. He walked inside the coat closet they usually used for parties as a coat return.

"I have a question about Adrian."

"Oh, he's not giving you a hard time too, is he?" Clay asked, not even a little thrown by the question. He flipped through the coats, searching and going back and forth. "What can I say? Blake is the baby of the family. We're all pretty protective. Some more than others."

"But what is Adrian to Blake? I don't want to disparage Adrian, I know he means a lot to your family... but I've gotten the impression he thinks of himself as more than a bodyguard."

"Because Adrian *is* more than just a bodyguard to Blake. Adrian has been Blake's only friend his entire life." He must've noticed the surprise flashing across Daniel's face because he explained further. "Blake had always been shy and unsure of himself. I think he compared himself to Link and Damien, thinking he was supposed to be as extroverted as them, but he's not, which I happen to love about him. So, when things didn't work out for Blake, he'd come home crushed. I think this is what softened Adrian a little bit. He was always quite cold, I'd even say robotic... but when little Blake

came around pulling on his sleeve that harsh facade crumbled."

"There it is!" Clay cheered and grabbed his long overcoat, quickly pulling it off the hanger and slipping it on. "But now that Blake is staying here and we're going back home, it's only natural Adrian is going to retire. I think helping Blake transition was the last chapter of his job with the family. It'll give him some peace—"

"Wait." Daniel did a double take as Clay passed him. "Adrian is retiring?"

"Technically, he's already retired. He was only going to stand by until we arrived. Of course, he won't be going home until after the wedding. I've bet Emma quiet a lot of cash that he'll be crying harder than any of us."

Daniel opened the door, using it to stay standing. All this information hit Daniel like a battering ram. Still, he couldn't let this go. Daniel asked Clay as he stepped into the falling snow. Just below the steps, a running car waited. "Sir, please ignore this question if I've taken a step too far but... could Adrian hold any romantic feelings for Blake?"

"What? Lord, no!" Clay blinked, short-circuiting. He hurried back up the steps and Daniel could almost see smoke billowing out of his ears. "Adrian's feelings are nothing but platonic..." he put his hands on Daniel's shoulders, giving them a tight squeeze. "I assure you. Does Adrian love Blake? Yes, he does, but it's more as a friend and even as a father. I'd never let Adrian come here if I even had the smallest inkling he did."

"Okay." Daniel nodded. "Thank you. Please forget I asked."

"It's alright. I'm glad you can come to me."

"I feel a tad foolish now."

Clay laughed and patted Daniel's shoulders one more time. "Don't be! You're still young and your feelings are so new. I've had a few jealous streaks of my own, you know."

Forcing himself to smile, Daniel wished Clay good luck with his

shopping. He stood in the cold, letting the fangs of winter sink into his skin. He longed to cool off to keep his brain from melting and he'd do something irreversibly stupid.

Taking a moment, Daniel fixed his shoelaces straight, tucked in his shirt tighter and fixed his belt buckle back to the middle. There. He felt a little more like himself. Brushing off the flakes of snow, Daniel walked back into the castle and strolled towards the library. Taking out his phone, he asked Michael to bring Blake his cellphone and a change of clothes to Daniel's room. He added:

Daniel: [And I'd like you to keep your comments to yourself.]

Michael's lack of reply said it all. Somewhere in the castle, Daniel could imagine the mutterings and his disapproving sighs, which tickled Daniel. He knew Frances would be loving every moment, so would Josephine and if Damien really knew where Blake spent the night, he might explode. Daniel smiled to himself, amazed he even had a few guesses.

Not too long ago, Daniel had no idea what was going on with anyone.

Didn't know what happened outside his precise calendar.

Finally, Michael replied:

Michael: [Fine. You won't hear a lecture about indecency from me. I'll keep my comments to myself as requested, but I do want you to know I have them.]

Shaking his head, Daniel laughed and started his reply when the library door opened before he could reach it. Daniel jumped back, the door just missing his face. Equally as surprised, Adrian straightened, taken aback.

"Oh, my apologies," Adrian said and stuck on the end like an afterthought, "Your highness."

Daniel just nodded, wishing to avoid all verbal altercations with Adrian. It wasn't a kink of Daniel's to be insulted or belittled at every turn. Most people wouldn't have the power to do this, but

Daniel knew Adrian when he was a kid, when he was insecure and wanted to be just as cool and commanding as the Winslow bodyguard. And when he never approved of Daniel, it crushed him.

He wanted to keep Clay in mind, needing to take his words as a form of comfort. It also helped to know Adrian would be gone after the wedding. Both men walked forward, but Daniel noticed Adrian waver strangely as he passed. Looking behind his shoulder, Daniel watched Adrian limp and Daniel slowed to a stop, his vision burning around the sides. He squeezed the doorknob, feeling the metal warp to the shape of his fingers.

That heat returned.

That festering itch that made Daniel sick to his stomach.

"Adrian?" He called and when Adrian turned, his actions were smooth, like there was nothing wrong. Daniel flicked his eyes away from the bodyguard's ankle and forced himself to smile brightly. "Are you alright? Is there something wrong with your ankle?"

Adrian's expression tightened, being bolted into place. "Not at all, your highness, but thank you for your concern."

"Of course." Daniel nodded again and he thought about letting Adrian leave, but there was a fire burning in his chest. He couldn't let it go. He needed to get this out or he might explode. He was so sick of princely niceties and politeness when Adrian wasn't affording him the same. "Adrian, I just heard the news. Congratulations on your retirement."

Adrian didn't flinch, which frustrated Daniel even more. "That's kind of you, your highness." He wanted to shake Adrian. Wanted to start a fist fight.

Daniel took a deep breath, letting his chest fill and his shoulders roll back. "I think you've planned this well. You can step down now that I'm taking over."

"You act like I'm already gone."

"I was thinking..." Placing his hands behind his back, Daniel walked

towards Adrian. "This is a time where you should be relaxing. Not working. So, I'll have Michael arrange a room for you at the hotel with the other wedding guests."

"Your Highness, you're too charitable. Does Blake know?" Adrian asked like he already knew the answer, like he knew Blake had nothing to do with this conversation and if he did, Adrian would be staying. This question said more, said something like "*Blake would choose me over you*."

This made Daniel's ears hot.

His jaw tightened, his teeth grinding together. "I know what's best for Blake."

This declaration only tickled Adrian. He chuckled and looked down on Daniel the same way he did when Daniel was a child. "You certainly sound like you believe it."

Adrian parted with the last word, leaving Daniel alone with all he wanted to say and do, regretting every second. Not a single nerve settled inside of Daniel. Nor did he find any relief. It was the right thing to do, wasn't it? But Adrian didn't even put up a fight. This was what Daniel wanted but... why did it feel like he just lost?

#

Author's Note

Hello friends! This update is a bit early, but I finished it and couldn't help myself! I've never been very patient >.< Sorry to interrupt all that fluff with some tension and a little plot! Haha. It's been a while since we had just Daniel chapter! It made me miss Blake a little 👄 (even though he's discussed the entire time).

SO! Let me know what you think ~ Do you think Damien will try anymore shenanigans? What did you think about Daniel's conversation with Clay? Do you think Clay is right? That Daniel shouldn't worry? And now, Adrian is leaving the castle! How do you think this will make Blake feel?

All comments are appreciated! If you like this book, check out my

others! I have three completed and another WIP I'm working on that involves a werewolf, a vampire and human in a poly relationship. There's lots of drama, mystery and of course, romance

28. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Someone knocked on Daniel's door just as Blake finished pulling his sweater over his head. "Michael?" He called out. "Did you forget something?"

That was strange. Michael never forgot a single detail about anything. He even brought Blake color coordinated underwear and socks. Swinging open the door, Blake surprised himself and ended up jumping back. Adrian wasn't who he expected to see on the other side dressed like he's got places to be and go, holding two bags at his side.

"What are you doing? Are you moving rooms?" Blake asked.

The side of Adrian's lip pulled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "In a way. I'm being relocated to the Venture Hotel with some of the other wedding guests—" He kept talking, going and going and making Blake feel like he just stuck his head outside a speeding car. Whiplash and deafening noise. Wanted to pump the breaks. "I wanted to wait to tell you after the wedding. I never wished to take the focus away from you or Daniel, but he's left me no choice. I'm retiring, Blake. The day of your wedding was supposed to be my last day, but obviously Daniel thought otherwise."

Short circuiting, Blake blinked and waved his hands around his head to maybe swat the confusion away. "Wait! Wait! Wait! Start over—" He froze "—what do you mean you're leaving? And retiring? This is a lot to tell me at once and I wish you had told me to sit down. Normally, people are asked to sit down before given big terrible awful news."

"I wanted to wait."

"And you didn't because?"

"Blake," Adrian whispered, forcing Blake to listen closely. He dropped his luggage and held Blake's arms to keep him from spiraling. "I wanted to make this transition as easy as possible. I didn't want to upset you."

"Well, I am upset."

Smiling softly, Adrian freed one hand to cup Blake's cheek. "Don't be upset. I believe the Prince when he says he knows what's best for you and if he thinks I should go, I'll go. He has all the power here."

Blake shook his head, growing more and more frustrated with every word. It was impossible to unpack it all at once, but Blake decided to try. This felt like a big mess anyways. "Is that what he said?"

"He did—"

Blake guffawed, infuriated enough for his blood to boil.

"He's the prince, Blake. If he doesn't want me in his castle, I must oblige."

Blake moved from Adrian's touch, storming away from Daniel's room. He didn't know where to begin, but he needed to say something, or he'd burst. "Knows what's best for me? Knows what's best for me?! As if! He didn't even want to get to know me until we were engaged!" Adrian chased him down the hall.

"Blake," Adrian tried to coax Blake back into his hands. "Blake, come here."

"No, no, I need to find Daniel and remind him that we're partners. He doesn't have all the power." Ready to fly down the hall, Blake put his foot forward when Adrian finally found purchase with his wrist, pulling him back.

"Daniel's right. I should go be with the other wedding guests."

Blake's chest tightened as he watched his caretaker try to put on a brave face for his sake. This time would be different. Blake would be the one to take care of Adrian. He owed him at least that much. Turning around, Blake threw himself into Adrian's chest and

squeezed him tight, so when he spoke, Adrian would take it as a promise, "You're not a guest. You're family." He popped his head up. "I'm gonna sort this out. You'll stay in my room if Daniel refuses to give your room back."

Adrian's hand combed through Blake's curls as he fondly looked down at his charge. "When did you get so grown up? It's about time other people stopped making decisions for you."

"I think so too."

Adrian softly chuckled and ruffled Blake's hair before sending him off. With a fire lit underneath him, Blake raced down the halls, desecrating the quiet and good manners of the castle by making the statues and chandeliers shake.

There was more than one demon under this roof.

And Daniel Bellerose better watch out.

#

DANIEL

"That desk is older than you," Josephine sing-songed from one of the ornate couches in front of Daniel's desk, the very thing he was digging four ruts into the top. He left four tan colored scars into the wood. Daniel yanked his hand away, his nails shortening back to something less monstrous and damaging. He sighed, but it didn't lessen the tightness in his chest or stop any of his tangled thoughts.

Josephine set her laptop to the side and jumped up onto his desk, crushing the papers underneath. Josephine sat prettily and her long cornrow braids swayed down her back. She kicked her velvet thigh high boots in the air and smiled at Daniel, expectantly.

He sighed again, dropping all his body weight into the back of his chair that tipped and rocked to his movement. "I don't want to talk about it," he said.

"Yes, you do or would you rather mope until you die?"

"The second one." Daniel placed his hand over his heart. "I want to keep it all bottled in until it crushes me."

Josephine rolled her eyes. "This is the modern world, Daniel. Acting macho about your feelings isn't attractive. Now, come here..." She made grabby hands, motioning him closer. "You can cry into arms without charge."

Daniel cracked a smile.

"Unless you feel some sense of duty. Then, by all means pay me."

She coaxed Daniel into a small laugh as he shook his head. "Why do you even want to listen to me gripe about my problems? It's not like I gift you the same privilege?"

"Because I'm living a life without worry. My life is far less complicated without arranged marriages and five-hundred-year-old curses. Not that I take pity on you for having such a handsome fiancé—"

As if on cue, Blake barreled into Daniel's office, letting the door slam on the other side. "Daniel Bellerose, you have absolutely lost your mind. What the hell were you thinking—?" His words stumbled when he noticed Josephine and all her attention. His brow just narrowed harder and all the lights in the room flickered. "Josephine."

He stepped to the side of the opened door. Not as subtle as hint. More like a blaring neon sign.

"Pardon me," Josephine excused herself before giving Daniel a wide-eyed horrified look. She hissed at her cousin as if accusing him of something so heinous he'd need a new last name. "What did you do?" She hissed before quickly making herself scarce.

Blake closed the door behind her and the light from the fireplace snuffed out. Coils of smoke rolled through the air between them. The only light seeped from the tall windows, fighting the heavy curtains. All stale light from a thick cloudy sky.

But it was colder in here than outside with the snow.

Crossing his arms, Blake didn't move closer, but he kept his voice low and steady. He must've been thinking the same as Daniel that Josephine was probably just outside the door listening. Her eavesdropping could be joined by anyone in the family. Daniel was worried more than just Damien feeling smug about them fighting.

He didn't want their parents to worry.

With the wedding only a week away, they needed to be assured that this curse was going to end and that they'd be safe. Nothing was wrong. Nobody needed to know.

"Daniel," Blake said his name like it took great effort and Daniel loathed the sound. "I just want one good reason why you kicked Adrian out without talking to me first. Just give me one good reason and we don't have to have this fight."

Daniel's chest tightened, remembering that smug look on Adrian's face after their discussion. That look Adrian used to warn him that this was going to happen. Blake walked into this room already on Adrian's side. It made Daniel feel already at a loss. "It sounds like we're already fighting. I'm not sure you're even going to hear what I have to say if you've already picked Adrian's side."

"Somebody has to! It's an abuse of power for you to kick him out like that. You're the prince, Daniel. He can't say no to you."

"I wasn't thinking about that at the time..." Daniel sighed, more frustrated with himself than anything. He always had trouble getting his feelings across when all the facts failed him. He stood, trying to meet Blake's eyes so maybe he could see what Daniel was surely going to forget to say. He just needed his feelings to reach. "When it comes to you, I forget all about being a prince and being a vampire. I forgot about magic and the world around us. I'm just worried about you."

Blake finally softened, but Daniel could still feel the barrier between them. Daniel felt stuck behind this desk. Blake spoke again, thankfully a little calmer this time. "There's protective. And then there's overprotective. Which is not romantic. You can't decide what is safe for me and what isn't. You have to talk to me first. Always.

For everything."

"Next time," Daniel promised. "I will."

"Good—"

"But this time, I need you to trust me. Adrian will be comfortable at the hotel. I just have this terrible feeling and I think he needs to go until after the wedding. Everything is riding on this wedding and I —"

Blake gawked. "You still think I'm going to let you kick him out because you had a feeling? No way. Isn't this supposed to be my home too?"

"Of course!" The floor underneath Daniel's feet had become quicksand and even though he knew the more he struggled, the faster he'd sink, Daniel couldn't stop. He was going to suffocate, using his last breath to make Blake understand. "But you can't see something is wrong because of how you feel about him."

"Not you too." Blake's nose flared, an angry flush flooding his face. "My whole family always thinks they can make decisions for me. You can't do this to me too."

Daniel wished he were something else for the first time in his life, yearning for the kind of magic that could take him back to yesterday when everything was perfect. Daniel didn't know how to get back to that from here. He was never in a fight with someone he cared about this much. Everyone typically just let him have his way.

"I'm trying to help you."

"I don't want your help. I don't need your help."

The silence growing between them was overpowering, turning Daniel's stomach like cement. Daniel sat back down. "I suppose this means we're at an impasse."

"I guess so," Blake agreed, biting back tears.

They held each other's stare until Blake couldn't bare it anymore and left. Daniel dropped his head, letting out a breath, but it wasn't enough to get rid of all of this festering frustration. He stood suddenly, his chair thrown back and hitting the wall.

Daniel was lost.

Just a month ago, he was fine being alone and dedicating his life to the coven and Sagewick. It took one person from his past, one magically beautiful guy to make Daniel need someone to feel peace to feel like anything was right. Now, it was all wrong.

"Are you happy?" Daniel asked Ignacio who he assumed was listening because he always liked to watch the show. "You ruined two perfectly lonely people. Cheers."

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I'm back! Finally! Yay! I'm so excited, despite the immediate drama haha. I'd love to know your thoughts on the chapter. Is anyone surprised by Adrian's behavior at this point? Haha. What did you think about Daniel's and Blake's fight? How will it be resolved?

All comments are appreciated! If you like my story, check out my other books! I have finished books ready to be devoured~

29. Blake

BLAKE

Standing in front of the mirror, Blake loosened his tie for the hundredth time. He had refused to get ready for the Gala with Daniel, declaring that he could get on fine without him and Michael's help. Blake had other options, but everyone was driving him crazy with Damien's smug look that things weren't going well, Adrian trying to get Blake to see things from Daniel's side and their parents for dismissing it as a nothing-fight just like they did when they kids.

What was the most aggravating was Ignacio's disappearance ever since Blake found out about the reincarnation scheme... Blake's first thought every time he saw Daniel was to tell him about the dreams and their shared past, but then he remembered all the terrible things he said and Blake would shut his mouth.

Daniel wasn't listening to reason.

So, he'd never understand something so unreasonable.

There was a knock on the door and Blake peered at it suspiciously. "Who is it?"

"It's Michael and I come in peace."

With a sigh, Blake told him, "Come in."

Alone, Michael stepped inside and he must've had a keen sense because he walked right up to Blake and started fixing his tie. Blake tried evading him, but the vampire assistant wasn't having it. "I'm not a little kid," Blake mumbled.

"You and his highness are both children to me. I'm fifty-four years

old."

Blake gaped at the blonde that had always looked the same age as him. Maybe even younger!

"You've never asked." Michael flattened his tie and examined the rest of Blake's dress, fiddling with things here and there. "I'm going to ask that you listen to me."

"Michael-" Blake was ready to sigh and reject him, but the stern look in Michael's face shut him up.

"I hope you'll listen to me because I like to think I've always carried the best intentions for you," he explained, cutting holes into Blake's resolve because he believed in Michael more than most people. Michael said, "I didn't know you two when you were younger, but from what I've heard you two weren't the best of friends."

"You heard right," Blake admitted.

"I can assume you had lots of fights back then and never resolved them. But you're older now, so you two must learned how to resolve your fights and make peace."

"I don't want to fight with him."

"I know."

"I still love him," Blake thought he might need to reassure Michael, hating to think he might believe otherwise. "But I love Adrian too."

"Don't worry so much. You boys will work this out," Michael insisted, squeezing his shoulders. The way he said it almost made Blake believe it... but not quite. A horrible feeling still made his stomach acids squirm.

"Daniel doesn't want my forgiveness."

"I won't speak for the Prince. I won't pretend to know what he's thinking, but I know he loathes fighting with you just as much as you do."

A knock on the door broke the boys apart as they looked over to Ignacio peeking inside. Squeamishly, the demon made a tiny wave. "Hello, hello. I hope this isn't a bad time," Ignacio announced as he waltzed inside wearing a green velvet suit that paired well with his warm brown skin but was a stark difference to his white hair that was styled nicer than usual. He still rocked the long pearl earring dangling right over his shoulder.

"Where have you been?" Blake gawked.

"I'll leave you guys to talk," Michael said, but he hesitated, giving Ignacio a once over, then two or three more times. "Why are you so dressed up? We were given the night off."

"Oh, uh, well," Ignacio crossed his arms, even shyer than before. "Frances asked if I would accompany him. Not as a date or anything. He just had a plus one invitation and bopped me with it, which was quite compelling."

"And you said yes?" Michael went wide-eyed and paler than ever. "Without any blackmail or monetary gain?"

"Um, no?" Ignacio cocked his head, looking more like a cat than ever. "Is that customary?"

Michael didn't answer. He just shook his head and decided to close that door. He muttered as he left, "You are officially the strangest person I've ever met."

He closed the door behind him, taking any lightness with him. Ignacio tensed along with the click of the door closing.

"You've been hiding from me," Blake said.

"I didn't know how to face you," Ignacio said, proving to still having trouble, narrowing his eyes at the wall. "You have so many questions, but I can't answer them all. It... it hurts too much." His voice cracked, a sob at the edge of his sentence.

"Iggy," Blake said while trying to keep from getting emotional and ruffling up his new costume. The press wasn't going to get tear-stained cheeks from him tonight. Blake's voice came out thin and he

needed to hold onto Ignacio for strength. "I'm not okay. I'm fighting with Danny and I feel like I'm two people."

"I do apologize for not preparing you even though I could see the signs that you were going to learn the truth anyways."

Blake squeezed Ignacio's arms, reeling him back. "These things I can handle. I just have to know the answer to one question..." Creeping closer, Blake whispered so no prying ears could hear them, so even the ghosts of Bellerose castle wouldn't catch on. "Is there any possibility that Edward could come back and stop the wedding?"

Ignacio didn't immediately answer.

And the silence cut like a knife.

All the blood in Blake's body ran thin and he thought he might vomit all over his shiny shoes, if his throat hadn't closed up. "A deal with a demon is a complicated thing." Ignacio carefully strung his arm around Blake's to escort him from the room because Blake assumed the world still needed to turn and despite it all, he still had to go to this ball. "Starting my deal with Henry ended my deal with Edward early, which means I broke our deal and that creates... possibilities."

"Stop talking around it."

"Deals fester a demon's magic, letting them live longer and grander and without care. But I broke a deal and all the magic I was building collapsed too."

"Is that why it took five hundred years for me to be reborn?"

Ignacio nodded. "I must confess to another lie. When I said my powers are restricted to the deal that wasn't true... I just can't do much more than change my appearance and make roses appear." Ignacio did a flourish with his hand and a small red rose materialized. He slid it into Blake's breast pocket with a little pat.

"So..." Blake stared ahead, trying not to remember Edward's fingers around his throat. "You're saying Edward could come back because you broke the deal with him and if he does, there's nothing you can

do about it."

"I'm saying I still owe him if he comes back."

The boys found themselves at the top of the staircase and Blake finally met Ignacio's eyes. "I'm scared, Iggy."

Ignacio cracked a smile and pointed two fingers at Blake like they were the horns of a devil. "Which is why you and Daniel should make up, get married and live happily ever after. No problem. You're welcome."

"You are a little demon," Blake grumbled, trying to get a kick at Ignacio before he scurried down the rest of the stairs, but Ignacio stumbled back and Blake's leg went limp.

Walking up to the steps, Frances shook his head with his signature smirk hanging off his lips. Blake had to rub his eyes just to make sure what he was seeing was real. The usually thrown together Frances had been polished into a diamond tonight. Still adorned in black, his princely attire was tailored to his lithe form perfectly. The jacket's trimmings were gold to match his rings and the sash across his chest. His unruly hair had been slicked back too.

Ignacio straightened like Blake just shoved a ruler up his shirt. "Frances?"

Knowingly, Frances dipped his head a little out of... shyness? Blake couldn't believe what was happening in front of him.

"Are you still trying to convince me that you're some sort of prince?" Ignacio teased, playing with one of the ornaments pinned to Frances's chest. Frances watched him fuss with it so fondly, he might as well been looking at his husband of twenty years.

With the same smirk on his lips, Frances took a step back and bowed. Not the over-dramatic bow he made to make fun of the whole ceremony, but one so proper it would've made Michael weep. He said, no sarcasm to be found, "I am Prince Frances Petrovic of the Rose Coven and it'd be my pleasure to escort you to the Sagewick Christmas Gala."

He offered his elegant hand and with twinkling eyes, Ignacio accepted the gesture, being led down the rest of the stairs. Ignacio whispered, "The pleasure is mine."

They must've forgot Blake was there at all, their sights only on the other. Frances laid Ignacio's hand on his arm and with perfect posture, he escorted Ignacio through the hall and towards the exit. It looked like something out of a movie.

Blake couldn't hold the jealous sigh leaving his lips. If Blake wasn't fighting with his own prince maybe he'd get a nice little romantic moment like this. Leaning against the railing, Blake suddenly felt exhausted and wanted to go back upstairs and kick off these pinchy shoes.

"Don't give up," someone said as if reading Blake's mind. He jumped and turned to find Adrian chuckling to himself. "After you get through this Gala, it'll be the calm before the real storm. You're getting married at the end of the week. Worry about that instead."

"I'm compartmentalizing my stress," Blake explained, pushing himself off the railing. "I'm only opening up what I can handle in the moment."

"If that's what you want." Adrian was dressed a little like a Grampa, obviously embracing retirement with his sweatpants and loose plaid thermal. It just made Blake smile.

"What will you be doing tonight?"

"Maybe some light reading. Might sleep earlier than usual. You know, go wild."

Blake's grin was cut short as Daniel shouts bounced through the hall. Following close behind Michael, Daniel strut from the second floor. "If we're ready, let's go. We're going to be late for our own event."

Daniel stopped at the top, narrowing his glare at Adrian. His anger infected Blake, seeping into his skin and making him red hot all over. Out of instinct, he crossed his arms. "Are you asking me? Or

are you demanding me, your highness?"

Rolling his eyes, Daniel threw his hands up in total defeat. "Good lord. You may have never dated anyone before, but you sure know how to fight." He stormed right past Blake towards the bottom floor. "The bachelors of the world should thank me for ridding you of the dating world. I shudder to think about the amount of psychic damage you'd do to an actual boyfriend."

Blake's face burned hot as he clenched his fists by his side to keep them from sparking, but the lights flickered anyway. Daniel's wording gnawed at Blake's patience. Actual boyfriend. Actual lover. Blake might actually throttle him. "And even though you've dated, you suck at fighting because everything you say just makes me angrier."

Michael was right.

They only knew how to fight like a couple of children.

"Blake," Adrian whispered and grabbed Blake's shoulder, holding him back. "Cut him some slack. He's the host of the Gala. That's a lot of pressure on his shoulders."

It took everything inside of Blake to keep from rolling his eyes. Frances didn't share the same restraint. He rolled his eyes with his entire being, shedding some of the princely pretense. "I'm so glad we're riding separate. Iggy, I've rented us a mustang."

"Now that I do have practice riding."

"Not with me." Frances winked.

"I guess I'll meet you at the car," Daniel told Blake. The man moved and rested like he was made of tension. Nothing short of a wrecking ball could make Daniel bend. Closer to the door, Daniel suddenly stopped. He turned and the softness in his eyes surprised Blake, hitting his heart like cupid's arrow. Daniel made Blake so weak with such few words. "Don't forget your coat. It's only going to get colder tonight."

Blake nodded, only now noticing how gorgeous he looked in his

princely garb. Unlike Frances's black and gold uniform, Daniel practically glowed in a creamy white. His embellishments silver, shining like diamonds and looking twice as expensive. So pretty Blake's fingers itched to reach out and touch, but he curled his hands into fists.

Eyeing Adrian for only a moment, Daniel's frown deepened, but he didn't comment. He left behind the others. Alone. The string tying their hearts together went taught and pinched Blake's chest.

"You should forgive him, Blake," Adrian had the gull to say.

Blake gawked. "You're defending him?"

"I just understand him." He reached down, combing Blake's hair. "You're so precious and if I thought isolating you would help you, I'd do it too. The wedding is only a week away. He's stressed and acting out."

"Still, he hasn't apologized. I shouldn't have to be the one to forgive him. I didn't do anything wrong."

"Calm down," Adrian insisted and cupped Blake's face, holding him gently inside his two gigantic hands. He leaned in close, keeping his voice low in attempt to soothe his charge. "Calm down. If you think he shouldn't get off so easily, maybe it'll be a good idea to test him?"

"Test him? How?"

Adrian smiled, leaning back as he slipped the rose out from Blake's pocket. "I might be retired but allow me to help you once again, sir." He touched the rose to his lips, hiding a small chuckle that Blake didn't quite understand, but Blake listened to every single word his former bodyguard said, wondering if his plan were even possible.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Double update~ And next week we'll be at the Gala. Nothing ever

bad happens at parties in books, right? Haha. We're also close to a couple of Frances chapter. You guys check Frances out this chapter? My boy has some moves. Delphine would be proud. I mentioned it on twitter, but the REAL romantic hero of this book and The Golden Rule is Frances and you can't change my mind. Lol.

Don't forget to like and comment on the chapter! What did you think about Blake's conversation with Ignacio? Did it answer some of your own questions? Will Blake and Daniel ever stop fighting?

If you like this book, check out my other stories!

30. Daniel

DANIEL

Out of all the times Daniel sat in the back seat with Blake, this was his least favorite. If it wasn't for the last week of their bickering and cold shoulders, Daniel could imagine all the things he would do with Blake Winslow in the back of a car, and they were leagues more fun than Daniel sneaking glances at him in-between staring out the window.

No. The ride to the Gala was unbearably quiet. It was the kind of silence bursting with all the things they needed to say but didn't. It created anticipation with no end. Michael didn't even try to lighten the mood with small talk, but then again, that was above his pay grade. His job tonight was getting the prince to the Gala. Not to clean Daniel's mess.

Michael's night would involve going home early to Wesley and most likely complaining about the adult men he's forced to babysit.

The stolen glances were the small morsels keeping Daniel nourished. Not fed. Not even close to being full. He'd bump Blake's knee and that would curve his hunger. They'd accidently brush their hands on the seat and Daniel could last a few more minutes. Seeing Blake still blush and nervously fiddle with his engagement ring comforted Daniel's aching stomach.

Daniel opened his mouth, a compliment on his lips. Just because they were fighting, didn't mean Blake didn't deserve to know how incredible he looked tonight.

Daniel's tailor out did himself with this dark sapphire blue suit that fit the witch like a glove. It highlighted his slim elegant form while accentuating his perky butt. It was maddening. All dressed up like the last cookie in the cookie jar. Tempting enough to make Daniel's

mouth water. Forbidden enough to drive him crazy.

At least Daniel looked adequate enough for Blake to ogle him too.

This was cruel and unusual torture.

But before Daniel could come up with an elegant way of telling Blake he'd love to see how easy it would be to take that gorgeous suit off, Blake spoke first. "Um," Clearly nervous, Blake had to clear his throat. This delighted Daniel, who moved closer and tilted his head around to entrap his fiancé. Maybe if Blake wanted to kiss him so bad, they could avoid talking and just make-out. Talking only led to more fighting.

And Daniel wasn't a liar.

He wouldn't lie to Blake just to be forgiven. Then, it wouldn't be real or mean anything.

Blake sucked in a breath, obviously flustered by their closeness. He held it in his chest as he suggested. "Let's call a truce for tonight. Not all of Sagewick needs to be in the middle of our fight."

Daniel nodded. "I agree."

"Besides, one news scandal is enough for me."

"Don't worry. I won't let that happen again...." Daniel gazed out the window at the flashing cameras and the line of people heading inside the Sagewick Museum. They reserved the great room for the ball so there'd be more spots to present the art going to auction. Daniel recognized plenty of guests that would be staying in town until the end of the week. For the bigger event. The wedding.

"Shall we?" Daniel asked, offering his hand to Blake.

Blake stared at him. He was too stubborn to really let this fight go, but the truce was his suggestion. With a sigh, Blake took his hand, and they walked the blue carpet into the museum. The carpet was littered with flecks of fake white snow, even though the chill in the air promised the real thing any moment. The walk was lined with small Christmas trees surrounded by presents wrapped in shiny

silvers and golds and all the ropes were tangled together with tinsel.

Most of the questions from reporters were all the same, all about the wedding and if there were any details the couple could give.

Until the end, one reporter put her microphone up to the boys, a small red bow perched on top. She was young and dressed as nice as some of the guests, but with a little Santa hat over her blonde curls. The twinkle in her eye shined brighter than the camera flashes. Daniel understood she didn't come to play around, especially as she focused her gaze on Blake. "What was the moment where you realized you wanted to marry the prince?"

Taken off guard, Blake glanced at Daniel. It must be hard to think past all the chatter and noise and all the anger still at the forefront of all his thoughts. Touching his engagement ring, Blake finally said, "When we were children, Prince Daniel was closer to my brothers than me..."

It was the first time Daniel was happy to hear Blake call him by his proper name. It made Blake calling him Danny feel more special, like it was something just the two of them owned. It wasn't meant for the whole world to hear.

"But we decided to become friends," Blake explained. "And we were just making each other laugh while acting so silly and..." Blake shook his head, his smile widening. "And sorry Daniel, but between us, he has the most ridiculous laugh and I thought I wanted to hear that for the rest of my life. With him, everything is more fun. He's my best friend which is ironic considering how much I hated him as a kid."

The reporter laughed a little and Daniel couldn't help it. His hand moved on its own, touching the small of Blake's back. This would be the first event where he wanted to leave before he even walked through the door. Usually, he loved seeing his own events unfold. He relished in the success and hearing people talk about it. Now he longed for a smaller event in Daniel's bedroom with an intimate party of two.

"And you, your highness?" She pressed on, raising the microphone

to his lips.

Daniel didn't look away from Blake's flushed face. "I actually had a crush on him when we were kids."

"You're just saying that," Blake argued, which made the reporter laugh.

"You were my first love, and I didn't know how to handle those feelings, so I pushed you away. But when I saw you again after all this time, I realized that you weren't just my first love, but you were also my last love."

Blake raised his shoulder, leaning into Daniel's hand. If there wasn't a sea of people and reporters, Daniel would kiss him. Blake smiled like he just might let him.

"Thank you for your time," the reporter said, blushing a little herself.

As they walked inside, Blake grumbled, "Don't think all is forgiven, Mister."

"Of course, dear."

Daniel chuckled and once they hit the marble floor, they got separated. Josephine nabbed Blake to show off a few of the artworks on auction. She forced him to make guesses on which one she inspired. It was wall to wall art with statues littering the floor. Everything sounded by lights, poinsettias, and trees. Even the band playing were wearing Santa hats.

Daniel was sucked into a discussion about the growing wolf pack in the mountains and the mermaids renting out one of the Inns by the shore. Sagewick was becoming a magical creature hotspot, it seemed. Daniel was eventually handed a small glass of dark liquid, which he smelled first now having learned his lesson.

Someone laughing pulled Daniel out of his conversation. He turned, spotting Blake without Josephine but someone else familiar...

It was Gino Borghese.

Gino Borghese and his tussled dirty blonde hair and bedroom eyes. He had that rumpled look about him. Like this may have been a nice event, but he was too cool to care.

Out of all the vampires in the world, it had to be Gino at this Gala. And he was making Blake giggle like they were preteens again. What felt like an angry snake coiled around Daniel's chest and squeezed. Heat trickled down his neck and he had to sit down his drink. By the look on Blake's face no one would guess they were fighting. He seemed perfectly fine. Having the time of his life even.

Daniel's feet were already moving before he had time to rethink his plan when he heard Blake say, "It was really nice seeing you again, but--"

Gino interrupted him, "Very nice to see you as well. You're just like I remember you, but somehow even more radiant. Be honest with me. This whole thing with Prince Daniel is arranged, isn't it?"

Daniel's stomach twisted.

Blake cocked his head. "I'm not sure what you really want from me, Gino. I meant it. It's nice to see you, but I'm actually looking for Danny right now. I'm ready to take a seat and don't want to start eating without him."

"Blake Winslow, you still know how to break my heart. Ciao." He waved goodbye and when he turned, he nearly ran Daniel right over. Gino jumped, but he recovered smoothly with a subtle nod. Daniel let him go without a fight. Blake met him the rest of the way.

"Shall we?" Daniel offered his arm.

Blake accepted the gesture and if felt good to have Blake's hand resting against him. "I'm not actually hungry," Blake explained. He must've realized Daniel had been listening.

"Oh, then why...?"

Blake went red around the ears. "Gino asked me if I wanted to dance, and well..." He craned his head around to spot the dance

floor of well-dressed people spinning circles around each other. "That looks pretty intense out there and I didn't know how to tell him that I can't waltz without thoroughly embarrassing myself."

Daniel stopped dead in his tracks.

The shocked look on his face just flustered Blake more. He panicked. "Well! I didn't really need to learn growing up and we never got to that part of the whole prince make-over thing."

Letting Blake's arm go, Daniel snatched up his hand instead. He took a step-in front of Blake and declared, "We are absolutely on a truce now. No matter how angry you're feeling, I need you to push it away for a little while because I have to right this world of a terrible wrong."

"It's not that big of a deal," Blake insisted.

"Blake Winslow, you were made for slow dancing. Come."

He pulled on Blake's hand, dragging him through the party. Having toured the museum before deciding on which hall to use, Daniel knew the layout relatively well. With only a nod, security allowed the prince to slip past the velveted off areas and walk right into the second ballroom. It was smaller than they needed for the Gala, but more than enough room for Daniel's plans.

He found the switch, basking the room in golden light from the several low hanging chandeliers. What wasn't a cream color was trimmed in gold, the same glimmering color clinging to the tall columns framing the room. Blake ran ahead, his feet echoing off the wooden floor, checkered between a lighter and darker wood.

"Wow! This is..." Blake shook his head, making his curls bounce as he looked up and took it all in. "This is amazing. Are we allowed to be in here?"

"Who's going to tell us to get out?"

Blake's laughter filled the room, creating the opposite of tension. Daniel relaxed for the first time in days. "Come here," Daniel said, offering his hands. "I'll lead first and then we'll switch. Just until

you understand the basics."

With a dumb look on his face, Blake snorted before wiggling his eyebrows like he didn't hear the subtext. "You're such a dork." Daniel shook his head, approaching Blake with his hands out anyways. No going back now. Blake met him the rest of the way, slipping his hands right into Daniel's cool palm. "I'm just sorry we don't have any music—"

Daniel spoke too soon.

From nowhere, from everywhere music began to play as if the ghosts of musicians were performing in the corner. He looked down, impressed by the witch before him. "Never mind."

As the music unfolded around them, Blake fixed his posture and intently listened to the basics and the rules of a simple waltz. Daniel's lips trembled as he tried to keep from laughing. He couldn't help it, sometimes Blake acted so cute it physically pained him.

"We're basically walking around in a circle," Daniel said, raising their hands and getting ready to start. "Just follow me."

Along with the song, Daniel took the first step slow, leading Blake to the side and then back. The rhythm of the song found them naturally and soon, they were gliding weightlessly underneath the chandelier and around the length of the ballroom. Everything outside didn't matter. They didn't speak and the silence between them electrified. Daniel already understood the unsaid with just one look. This dance felt like something he'd been waiting for, for his whole life.

Waiting five hundred years for this dance.

To have Blake in his arms.

Daniel remembered what Clay Winslow said about believing in destiny. Daniel has found himself to be a believer too or why would the light in the room glow so brightly? Why would the music be able to vibrate through every bone, every muscle, and cell in his body? How could it all feel so perfect? The answer was in front of

him. It had always been in front of him.

Blake Winslow. The love of his life.

Maybe even the next.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Wowwww chapter 30?? Can you believe it? I can't. We're approaching the storm guys, so buckled up. I'm so nervous >.< We've been building up to SOMETHING and it's almost here. GAH! But until then, next chapter we start with a Frances POV ;)

TWO Frances chapters, if y'all can handle that. Haha. A bit of fun before the (more) drama.

Also, I wasn't specific to the music. If I were, it'd probably be something played 500 years ago. BUT in the movie version, you know my girl--Christina Perri's A Thousand Years would be playing. I feel like I owe that woman money for the help she's given me writing this book. Lol. If you heard a different song, let me know!

All comments are appreciated <3

31. Frances

FRANCES

EARLIER...

"Rent a suit?" Daniel's tailor, Crawley gawked, thoroughly ruffled like a plucked chicken. The man was somehow as old as time, but younger than Frances. A mortal that smelled like cough drops, tweed, and a hint of snobbery. The man couldn't get over Frances's simple request. "Rent a suit?! Absolutely not."

Out of all the upsetting things Frances could say, this was what threw this guy over the edge. "Come on, Crawley," Frances begged, hands in pray as he laid across the man's counter. The tailor shop had the usual leather and man sweat smell, but with a few sprinkles of nutmeg from one of the many Christmas decorations.

A little Christmas tree sat in the corner, covered in bow ties and cufflinks for sale. Another one stood on the counter by Frances's elbow, offering miniature candy canes. Garlands framed all the mirrors and the counter as people long dead sang Christmas songs from the speakers. There were more women here than usual, snatching up last minute gifts and generally making it a brighter place to visit.

Frances bowed his head, smacking his forehead on the counter. "Just let me rent one for the Gala thing."

"No. You're a Prince for goodness's sake, Frances Petrovic. How could you not bring a suit of all things for your trip here? You're staying in a castle and escorting the prince that alone would call for suit. Were you not aware that you'd be attending the Christmas Gala?"

"I mean--" Frances huffed, kicking the side of the counter, probably scuffing his leather shoes, which would just enrage this man more.

It was so frustrating to ask for the things he wanted. Sometimes Frances wanted a sliver of what his friend back home had. His friend, an Alpha werewolf named Eric could just ask for things and no one would question him.

No one would be needling Eric or Daniel on why they needed to rent a suit.

They'd just give it to them.

When it came to Frances apparently, he had to recite an essay and convince the world his intentions were good. "Yeah!" Frances threw his hands up, losing more and more maturity by the second. "But like I was just gonna wear whatever. No one cares what I'm doing or wearing—" Frances huffed again, tired of having to explain himself. "Old man, just take my money and let me rent a suit."

"Wear whatever?" Crawley touched his chest. "I'm appalled."

"I noticed." Frances slumped, but his words were lost on the flabbergasted man.

"Frances," Crawley started what sounded like a lecture. Frances knew the sound well. All his princely titles vanished when he needed a stern talking to. "This is unacceptable. You knew you were coming to Sagewick Castle to chaperone the prince and his fiancé." While he was talking, Frances lost control and good sense, rolling eyes. Crawley snatched the paper he was reading and whacked Frances in the head with it, his voice growing with more fervor. "You knew about this Gala and that you'd be attending the royal wedding as a groomsman. What were you thinking?"

"Alright, alright!" Frances practically begged for relief. "I get it. It was a dumb idea. I figured I could coast on the groomsman suit being picked out for me and I could just roll up in something clean for the Gala thing."

"Come to the back. We'll get your measurements..." Crawley motioned him, expecting Frances to follow and he did, tail between his legs. "If you were hoping to just coast..." Crawley quoted Frances back to him with a large helping of side eye. "Why do you want a

suit now?"

"You're gonna force me to get a suit *and* you're gonna make me talk about my feelings?" Frances groaned, trudging up to the small platform in front of the many mirrors to show Frances his terrible posture.

"And I expect to be paid double," Crawley added and patted Frances's shoulder. "Remove the leather jacket."

Frances let the mortal snatch away his shield from his hands before Frances raised his hands in mock crucifixion. He spat it out, annoyed he was even admitting it to Crawley. "I want to impress a boy. Okay? Are you happy?"

"Delighted." Crawley chuckled while deft thin old man hands went to work, taking measurements and pinning things and complaining about his posture. The man worked like a doctor about to administrate a shot, promising little pain and a quick job done right. Except it was also nothing like a doctor, being the treatment was incredibly painful and it felt like it took forever.

But by the next day, Frances picked up his suit, paid the man and tipped him. He had stood in the great hall at Sagewick castle feeling like an actual tool, like guys he made fun of in college. Guys like Daniel, in fact. Who was he? Frances even put cologne on and not even those test perfume strips he could rip out of magazines.

Well, technically he stole it from Link.

But still, it was the fancy kind kept in glass jars and he reeked of it.

He heard Ignacio's voice first, intermingled with Blake's. Their tones were so serious. Probably about the fight between the lovebirds. Didn't Daniel and Blake know the honeymoon period was supposed to last long enough to reach to the honeymoon? Frances was beginning to think they enjoyed fighting.

Frances approached the stairs, a joke cocked and at the ready to lessen the seriousness of his dress, but he forgot it the moment he caught Ignacio's eyes. He had warm brown eyes like sugary syrup

and an even sweeter smile. Amazing that a suit could take an already gorgeous man and make him twice as beautiful. All the air left Frances's lungs.

Dressed in a deep green suit, Ignacio could vanish inside a treasure trove of emeralds and diamonds. A lump of nerves pulsed in Frances's throat and he imagined, if he could sweat, he'd be dripping.

Ignacio blinked, surprised to see him too and Frances realized he lacked the practice of steeling his nerves.

"Frances?" Ignacio called his name to make sure what he was seeing was correct. Blake had to adjust too.

Yes, Frances thought, *Everyone look while you can. This is never happening again.*

He resisted running away.

"Are you still trying to convince me that you're some sort of prince?" Ignacio teased him and with his slender fingers, he played with one of the medals on Frances's chest. The small place he touched electrified Frances's skin. Tilting his head, Frances tried burning this look of joy from Ignacio and at the way he could be so comfortable around this boorish vampire.

This was dangerous.

Frances could get used to it.

And Ignacio's smile, he didn't want it to end. With a smirk on his lips, Frances took a step back and bowed. He used his most princely sounding voice and finally cashed in on all the lessons he received as a child to act proper. He reintroduced himself, "I am Prince Frances Petrovic of the Rose Coven and it'd be my pleasure to escort you to the Sagewick Christmas Gala."

He offered his hand on a silver platter and with twinkling eyes, Ignacio accepted the gesture. His hand was warm to the touch and soft like peach fuzz. Ignacio whispered, "The pleasure is mine."

Frances wanted to savor this moment and the next, feeling as if it was all happening too fast. He didn't want to miss a single second of Ignacio's smile or this bubbling feeling of joy bursting through him. It was the best Frances had felt in a long time. And he knew deep down that he'd never get this chance again.

After Christmas, Frances would go back to the city and leave Sagewick behind. It had been like living a fairytale, but like most stories, he'd had to reach the end. Some tales didn't end with happily ever after, they ended with lessons.

At the end, Frances would be taught he was not the hero in these stories.

He was just the side kick. The comic relief.

The jester never got the guy.

Immediately, Daniel and Blake bulldozed their moment starting another dogfight. With Ignacio, Frances escaped the fighting to go to the mustang parked outside of the castle. He could feel Ignacio lag behind and Frances turned worriedly. Did he already make a mistake?

"Frances," Ignacio said like he was already regretting it. "I know you put in great effort to get ready for the Gala but..." Ignacio fiddle with his hands. "I was hoping we could skip it and meddle instead."

Frances unleashed a long sigh of relief. He unbutton the top of his coat and fussed with his hair, ridding himself of all the icky perfection. This was beginning to feel more like them. "I knew you were the best date for me."

Ignacio grinned, his dark eyes twinkling again and stupefying Frances. Around Ignacio, he had to work harder on keeping up with his aloof "act". He had become so accustomed to people groaning at the sight of him, it was totally unknown territory for this person to seem excited to see him, to want to be around him longer than necessary, and actually cause the same amount of chaos as him.

"What did you have in mind?" Frances asked.

Ignacio grinned and told Frances his meddlesome plan, making this the best date Frances has ever been on. Not every gorgeous boy has asked him to stick his nose into other people's business, so Frances didn't want to waste the good opportunity.

#

Author's Note

At first, I thought I could fit what I wanted from Frances' POV in one chapter... but I was wrong. I was having too much fun with him at the tailor's shop. So, here comes more Frances. I just think he's so cute.

All comments are appreciated!!

32. Frances

FRANCES

Wearing a hoodie over his nice clothes, somewhere in the world was probably giving Crawley a stroke. All that work and money just to hide it. Frances stopped caring. It was worth it to see Ignacio's smile. Ignacio smiled like a kid, all dimples, teeth and gums without regard for other people's judgement.

Ignacio grabbed Frances's arm, giving it a squeeze so he'd be sure Frances was paying attention to Blake and Daniel strolling down the blue carpet. It'd be more difficult for Frances to stop watching him. Every expression felt new and different. Every word came as a surprise. Frances was simply fascinated. He wanted to show everything to Ignacio and then gauge his reaction.

"They're not asking the right questions," Ignacio grumbled, scowling at the press. It was all frantic and bright lights on this side while just beyond a rope, people were serenely strolling down a blue carpet while flecks of snow drifted from the clouds. Two different worlds. All their questions related to the wedding. Pretty standard stuff about décor and all the things that gave Frances hives.

"What should they be asking?" Frances asked.

"The RIGHT questions. Something more romantic. Who cares about wedding colors? The real story is them, at least it should be."

An idea popped into Frances's head and he grinned, taking Ignacio's hand off his arm and exchanging it for his hand. "Let's go. I know what we can do."

"Dangerous," Ignacio egged him on and there was bit more pep in Frances's step as he led Ignacio through the throng of reporters towards the very end. A younger woman, the only person wearing a Santa hat was basically hiding in the corner, hyperventilating or

doing breathing exercises or something.

"She's the one," Frances decided and let Ignacio go to walk up to the reporter. "Excuse me, are you alright?"

"I'm fine. Totally prepared. No worries—" Her voice caught in her throat as she met Frances's eyes. Magic for Frances felt like striking a match, causing his magic to burst and then burn inside his veins as if blood was still fresh on his tongue. His eyes flashing red, his words came out like slow running honey and he watched this girl's eyes go cloudy and her face slacked.

"*I have a question you can ask the prince and Blake Winslow... ask Blake first 'What was the moment where you realized you wanted to marry the prince?' Don't let them get away with a vague answer."*

"*I'll ask them*," the reporter echoed his accent at first, until she blinked out of her stupor. "Yes. That's good. I'll ask them that..." she whispered, nodding to herself and facing the guests walking the carpet again.

"How's that question?" Frances turned around, checking for Ignacio's approval. He found Ignacio to already be staring at him, lips parted in half surprise and half awe. It was a look that suggested he'd like to know the answer for himself from Frances to him.

Ignacio eventually choked out, "Um, yes. That will do nicely."

They still waited for Daniel and Blake to come through the line of reporters, wearing plastic smiles that only Frances and Ignacio could recognize. Blake seemed better prepared this time around. Not overwhelmed by every camera flash or question.

Until Frances's star reporter.

The fake princely façade crumbled as the romantic microscope narrowed in on Blake, he was caught off guard enough to talk less like a robot with recorded answers, but with a genuine blush and with Daniel dreamily staring at him. The distance between the fiancés lessened and Frances felt like it was a job well done.

"I..." Ignacio cleared his throat, surprising Frances as he turned.

Dazed almost, Ignacio's voice came out as soft as velvet "That really was the perfect question. I didn't realize you were a romantic."

"You haven't realized it already? Well, I'm not doing my job then." He grabbed Ignacio's hand again, getting used to the feel. Just a few more times and Frances might figure out how they fit perfectly together. "And our job's not done, right? We haven't got them throwing themselves at each other yet."

With a nod, Ignacio agreed, letting himself be led as he glanced behind his shoulder to spy on the boys one last time. "The eyes are nice, though. It's all in the eyes."

Frances snorted.

The pot called the kettle black. Ignacio's first language was romance. Frances didn't know how, but he seemed to attract people much gooier on the inside than him.

Working around the reporters and the crowds on the street that hoped to grab a peek of the prince and his shiny new fiancé. Frances searched for the catering vans and followed the staff inside, through the bustling kitchen. "Sorry, sorry, we will be out of the way in two seconds. It's fine. I'm a prince!" Frances announced as he slipped and maneuvered out of everyone's way, making Ignacio laugh, which made Frances laugh.

They stumbled out of the kitchens, dodging more servers with full trays. Before they could escape, Ignacio snatched little goodies for them both. "What's next?" Frances asked and he was sent on a mission to find a way to separate Blake and Daniel once they entered the party. It was easy. A fifty dollar bribe to Josephine to nab Blake. A random detail about some boring piece of news to the stuffiest person in the room and he went searching for Daniel.

"You make it look easy," Ignacio complimented him as they retreated to the emptiest corner, behind a Christmas tree. They sat snug on the floor like little kids getting ready to spy on Santa Claus. The strings of light set their skin aglow and Ignacio looked more like precious gemstones than ever.

"I guess I'm inspired..." Frances whispered, keeping his voice low so Ignacio would have to lean close to hear him. His eyes traveled the lines of Ignacio's face to the curves of his lips. If it was all about the eyes, Frances wanted Ignacio to see it all. Ignacio was caught and leaning and hot and Frances wanted to remove the space between them.

No.

What he wanted most was to drag Ignacio to the closest empty room and explore every inch of the witch's strange assistant. But it was more than that. Frances burned with questions about Ignacio's family, his likes, his dislikes, and everything else. He wanted to know Ignacio better than anyone. A childish want. But Frances's heart had never matured.

He has been so used to being the friend, a sex friend, or the best friend, he was never able to explore more relationships with less innocent intentions. But sitting here, alone with Ignacio, Frances wanted to be anything but friends and do the things more than just friends do.

Ignacio's tongue flicked out between his lips, wetting the top and bottom, igniting something feral inside of Frances. The same scent of wanting rolling off Ignacio was pulsing inside of him too. These desires collided like explosions in the air. Frances's hands reached out on their own, sliding across Ignacio's jaw.

"Frances, you son of a bitch!" Someone shouted and the vampire's bones hit the ceiling. His hand retracted as he twisted to find an old friend, Gino Borghese. He was just as tall, rumbled, and annoying as Frances remembered the vampire. He was the romance cover version of what a vampire should look like, dripping with sex appeal and smelling of fresh blood.

"I saw a leg poking out from behind the tree and I assumed I'd be scaring some kids. Turns out I wasn't totally wrong." His accent was low and growling, directed at Frances, but his eyes flicked at Ignacio immediately.

Frances jumped up, rekindling Gino's full attention. When Ignacio

tried to stand up, Frances pushed him back down. If Gino was still the same. He was still a single man with a double king sized bed that always came with an open invitation.

"How are you? It's been so long?" Gino shook Frances's hand, pulling in closer to pat his shoulder.

"I'm good, how about you?" Frances returned.

"I'm well, thank you. Why on earth are you in Sagewick?"

An idea popped into Frances's head that was so brilliant he hoped the light bulb over his head blinded Gino just a little. "I'm here for the wedding, of course. I'm part of Prince Daniel's wedding party. Not best man material, but I would never insinuate I am. Can you believe they're getting married? Have you seen Blake?"

"I haven't..." Gino admitted, giving the crowd a once over. "Is he well?"

"If by well you mean hot? Hell yeah. What did Emma and Clay Winslow do to make a bunch of a sexy guys like that? I wanna a bucket of that potion. I'll bathe in it."

"Hmm..." Gino hummed, still searching the crowd. To help the guy, Frances used his hand to rest on the vampire's shoulder, steering him into the right position to finding Blake all alone and vulnerable to strange men's flirtations. Despite being Daniel's fiancé, people around the ballroom were making glances at him like he was going to be the prize at the end of a foot race. Not that Blake ever notices that kind of thing.

Like the little demon on his shoulder, Frances whispered into his ear, "I'm thinking it's a fake engagement to make Daniel look more likeable. Bet the wedding gets cancelled last minute."

Below, Ignacio smacked Frances's leg, which he ignored, but he could feel the annoyance pour out of Ignacio like steam spurting out a boiling tea pot. Frances bit his cheek to keep from snickering.

Gino brandished his warmest smile. "I think I'll just go say hello."

"Have fun." Frances gave him a gentle push. "But not too much."

The second Gino left, aimed right at Blake, Ignacio jumped up and gave Frances' arm a smack. "What was that? It's not a fake engagement—"

"*I* know that. *We* know that. Gino just needed an excuse to flirt and the moment Daniel sees Gino chatting Blake up, it'll put the Prince of Social Anxiety into action. Enough dancing around. Time to get the kids back together."

"Something is definitely happening," Ignacio said and pointed to Gino charming a laugh out of Blake.

Frances nudged Ignacio a little, hoping to knock a little of his worries away. "Blake isn't going to run off with Gino Borghese. The only thing running off with Gino is the first incurable vampire STD."

Ignacio's eyes narrowed either because he didn't believe Frances or he didn't understand what he was talking about, but he didn't argue anymore. From behind the Christmas tree, they watched Gino and Blake interact and on schedule, Daniel noticed and approached... but stopped. Frances straightened, wishing he knew what Blake could say to stop Daniel in his tracks.

Unlike Frances once in a pub in Ireland, Blake managed to give Gino the brush off. Daniel took his rightful place and while continuing to be confused, Frances and Ignacio ended up following the boys to another ballroom. Daniel managed to find the lights, but it was eerily quiet and still.

"This won't do..." Ignacio whispered, grabbing Frances's arm. He liked the way the man clung to him when he needed someone to lean on. "Whatever I do. Just go with it."

"Always," Frances said and held his hand up in promise.

With a nod, Ignacio closed his eyes and as his white hair raised like the air electrified suddenly, music trickled in. Nothing Frances recognized. Something older than time. He soaked in the sound and rested his cheek onto his hand, watching Blake and Daniel dance in-

between staring at each other. Without catching Ignacio on, Frances could feel the man sneaking glances at him.

"What's the big deal with dancing? They're just holding hands and spinning around."

"Holding hands can mean a lot for some people...." Ignacio reached over, nudging Frances's finger, making it turn and lift as Ignacio aligned all their fingers together until their palms rested against each other. Their hands were almost the same size. "Human contact. Skin touching skin. If you don't have it for a while, you begin to crave it like any... human need. Just as dire as hunger and thirst."

"You sound pretty fucking lonely."

"I am..." Ignacio smiled despite the sadness dripping from his words. "Well, less now, but for a very long time I was..."

They held hands and Iggy smiled. When he couldn't contain his smile anymore, Frances asked, "Do you know how to dance, Iggy?"

"Are you asking me out of curiosity or are you asking me to dance with you?"

"Maybe I am."

"Hmm..." Ignacio peered at Frances with his molten brown eyes, seeing right through the vampire like cellophane. "Why don't you just ask then instead of avoiding the question? Are you afraid of rejection?"

"Not afraid. That's not the right word. It's more like I'm... preparing for it."

"Ask me properly."

"Iggy, would you like to dance with me?"

"Yes, Frances. I would like to dance with you..." Ignacio's hand slipped into Frances's and it was so warm, the cool layer across Frances's skin melted and for the first time in his undead existence, he had an idea of what pure sunshine might feel like without the

barrier of a spell. Pure sunny warmth.

Frances led Ignacio out into the long hallway. They were backed by floor length windows with a golden Christmas tree perched in front of every single one as snow fluttered from the night sky behind it. On the other side were more paintings, more creations that tried to rival Ignacio, but failing spectacularly.

"I'll lead—" Ignacio offered, but Frances shook his head.

"No, I'll lead." Francis rolled back his shoulders. "I'm a prince."

Ignacio melted inside Frances's hands, letting himself be swayed in this dance. No one ever smiled at Frances the way Ignacio did. Frances could get lost in it. They could just hear the music from the grand hall, enough to tell Frances the way. He turned round and round as slow as creamer cutting through coffee's dark abyss and they passed the windows, basking into their light.

"What are the moves to this dance?" Ignacio asked, scowling at their feet. "What is the footwork?"

Frances laughed. "There's only one rule. Make sure to look at your partner and not their feet." Ignacio flicked his eyes up and his chosen attention was first Frances's eyes, but interest waned down closer to his lips. Frances whispered now that they were so close and the air prickled with intimacy. "Just move how you feel."

"How I feel?" Ignacio echoed his eyes as big as ever.

Frances tilted his head, confused by Ignacio's confusion. Concern lined Frances's stomach. He leaned in closer, keeping his voice soft and low. "Don't tell me no one's ever asked you how you feel?"

Ignacio searched for that answer in Frances's eyes. He whispered, words that he had to dig from deep down. "How do I feel?"

"I wanna know." Frances shrugged a little.

"I... I've lived for quite some time and I have kissed plenty of creatures, but I've never met someone that I wanted to kiss so badly until I met you."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Frances, taking his words to heart and grabbing Ignacio's face and pulling him into a kiss. There was no resistance, but a desire to be pulled even closer. Like Ignacio, Frances has kissed plenty of men and women, but kissing has never quite been like this. Kissing has never made Frances feel this particular way either.

From touching Ignacio's skin and soft lips, his warmth washed over him and pooled inside his chest and filled it to the point of almost bursting. Kissing Ignacio was like magic. Frances was too excited, maybe being too forward as he backed Ignacio into the closest window. It was a different kind of humiliating to like someone this much.

If Frances from a few years back saw him, he'd be baffled both by his dress and by how desperate his hands yanked Ignacio closer. Wrapping his arm around Ignacio's back, Frances pressed the man against the window, using his other hand to support himself as his tongue performed a magic all of its own. A moan vibrated from Ignacio's throat as Ignacio ran his hands from Frances's neck, up through his hair. Ignacio's hands never stayed in one place long, leaving a trail of sparks in his wake.

Frances could hear his heart fluttering and that just fueled Frances more. Awakened something terrible in him. He wanted to know everything about Ignacio. Less innocent things. Wanted to know every sound he could make and if he was the type to go weak in the knees or shiver. Frances nipped at Ignacio's lips and it turned out, he was both types. Unable to help himself, like a greedy little vampire, Frances grinned on the way to kiss Ignacio's neck. He sucked on his skin, dragged his teeth, but didn't puncture him. Every close call caused a shiver to pulsate through Ignacio.

Frances was saving that for later fun.

A gasp suddenly ripped out of Ignacio and someone else cleared they're throat. Frances snapped his head up, letting Ignacio go to stand on his own. Whoever approached didn't have any presence that Frances picked up, making his neck hair raise.

"My apologies," Adrian of all people said. He sheepishly rubbed the

back of his neck. "When I came to find Ignacio, I didn't think he'd be so... busy."

"Dude," Frances huffed and wiped the wetness off the corner of his mouth. He snuck a glance at Ignacio, who was trying to put himself back together too. There was still a sticky sweet smell pouring out of him and Frances wanted another taste. That was nothing but a sample to a full meal. Frances growled at Adrian without thinking. "You have to talk about this now?"

"Actually, I do. It's a few important details about the wedding that I need to discuss with Ignacio," he said and only now, Frances noticed Adrian was only looking at Ignacio. He'd been doing it this whole time. Not sparing Frances a glance.

"With me?" Ignacio pointed to himself.

Frances shook his head. "Surely, Michael is the better choice—"

"No." The word plummeted from Adrian's mouth and smacked the floor with a heavy thud. It hit Frances like a shove to the middle of the chest. "It must be Ignacio. Come." Adrian motioned Ignacio as if he were a misbehaving child. "Now."

Just as Frances opened his mouth to argue more, Ignacio took a hard step forward, out of Frances's bubble, and Ignacio jumped like he was surprised by it too. Ignacio snapped his eyes down at his feet, but tilting his head up took ages until he looked at Adrian. His eyes widened and a chill passed through Frances. The sudden rise of tension made it difficult to move as if all the air had been replaced with cement.

"Iggy?" Frances grabbed his date's arm. "Are you okay?"

"Of course. Why wouldn't I be?" Ignacio removed Frances's hand and then, pressed his hand to Frances's chest, smoothing down the fabric. "Thank you for taking me here... Tonight was some of the most fun I've ever had and I never get to just have fun, but everything with you is fun so.... Well, I'm so happy to have met you."

"Why does this sound like goodbye?" Frances grabbed the hand on his chest. "You're just going to talk about the wedding, right?"

"Of course. Get home safely." Ignacio slipped out of Frances hold and walked up to Adrian, falling in line right behind him. He seemed so small facing Adrian's back with his head down, encased in his shadow.

Alone, surrounded by darkness and the whispers of a good party in the other room, Frances's stomach turned. He looked at his phone, unsure what else to do. When he looked up, the pair had already disappeared.

Frances cursed.

Without another thought, Frances ran back down the hall and stormed into the smaller ballroom. "Hey, guys! Blake! Danny, I think something is wrong—" Frances stumbled to a stop in the middle of the room just as the music died and the lights went out.

Everyone was gone.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Soooo this chapter was WAY longer than intended. I was just going and going and now we're gone... Extra side note, I have been listening to covers of Somethin Stupid covers and thinking about Frances and Ignacio. Enjoy that image.

And uhhhh what's Adrian doing over here? He wasn't even invited? That's weird. Oh well. They're just gonna talk about the wedding, right? And where did Blake and Daniel go? Poor baby Frances got left at the party alone. Loved to hear your thoughts!

33. Daniel

DANIEL

What started off so grand like a fireworks display had become so small like a single candle flame in darkness. Less like an event, more like an intimate affair. Daniel preferred it that way. Smiling softly, Daniel rested his head against Blake's curls as Blake's face laid snugly on his shoulder. One arm around Blake's waist and his other still cradling his hand, but much closer. They barely moved more than an inch with each step. The ballroom was only seeing a small square of action.

Daniel never wanted to leave this position.

Daniel nuzzled his cheeks against Blake's hair, wafting up his herbal smell, like fresh rosemary. He could feel Blake smiling against his shoulder, but the expression didn't last long. Daniel chuckled. "Care to share with the class? You know I can feel you thinking."

"No, you can't. That's not a vampire thing."

"No. It's a I've-known-you-since-we-were-kids kind of thing."

"It's just...." Blake lifted his head much to Daniel's disappointment. "I just realized something after we answered that last reporter's question and now I can't stop thinking about it."

"That you're more in love with me than ever?" Daniel had meant to tease Blake, but no humor found Blake's face.

"You never apologized to me for avoiding me during my first few days in Sagewick. You never apologized for being late. Maybe I'm realizing now that you just don't know how to apologize."

Daniel's face sharpened into a scowl. This might be the thing that set him over. He stopped the dance but couldn't bring himself to

release Blake from his arms.

"I'm sorry I was late. It was a dick move," Daniel said, channeling a bit of Frances and Michael. He admired their bluntness. If he didn't let all of this go now, the pressure would never leave, and Daniel would surely be crushed.

"What are you doing—?"

Daniel couldn't stop once he started, the words coming out as certain as he was loud. "Things that I don't understand and can't plan for scare me and I was a coward, but we both know that. But now I'm not going to be afraid to admit it when I'm weak. I'm also sorry that when we were kids, I was a part of Damien's scheme to interrupt your date at the movies with that one kid that asked you out as his secret Santa present. Brent or whatever!"

He never mentioned that before.

Probably didn't need to now.

Blake gawked. His jaw seemed to have snapped out of place and he may never shut it. Never stopped being surprised. "I'm sorry I told everyone you were a cry baby. I'm sorry I didn't stick up for you then, even though I did like you. I'm sorry I was a lying little bastard."

"Danny," Blake said, speechless otherwise.

"And I'm sorry I wasn't concerned with how you were feeling at the beginning of all this. I was afraid of my own feelings and took it out on you. I'm sorry I pushed you too hard to change your clothes and learn etiquette."

"No, no I-"

"I'm sorry I can be immature when it comes to you and I'm sorry I was being a little possessive."

"Where's the 'but'?"

"There's plenty I am sorry for and I will apologize for it. Especially

when I'm wrong. If you taught me anything, it's that I can't fix everything by myself. I miss plenty of stuff and for the rest of our lives, you're going to have to tell me things that are to everyone, but me and you'll have to tell me when my ideas are bad."

"I've been an ass, but..." Daniel paused, ready to hear Blake's argument, but he was wrong about that too. Blake just looked on, drowning in all of Daniel's confessions. "But I still think there's something going on with Adrian and it makes me nervous. I don't want anything to go wrong before or during the wedding."

"I want to believe you," Blake admitted. There was something in Blake's face that Daniel couldn't read, a work of art that he couldn't decipher the meaning.

"Then, believe me." Daniel dropped his hands to his sides.

"I'm just worried because..." Blake swallowed, a tremor of real fear rattling his nerves. "Because I have to tell you something important and if you don't trust me, I don't know what I'll do."

"But I do trust you."

"Do you? Because that's not what it looks like."

"I trust you. Not Adrian."

"My family and I are a package deal, Danny. And trust goes both ways. It must be mutual. This is only the start to our relationship, and it feels like you're the only one with power."

This fight was just the two of them running in circles and Daniel was exhausted. He thought he was nearing the finish line, but Blake moved it back again. "What do you want me to do?"

Blake's brow twitched. He sucked his lips in as if to keep something at bay. Spatting it out anyways, Blake blushed as he said, "Let me be in control." Daniel didn't respond, knowing there'd be more. "Meet me at Sagewick Park. Leave the party. Meet me there and then, I have something to tell you."

"I can't leave the party," Daniel half gawked, half laughed. He

glanced at the door, knowing everything just on the other side was what he had worked on for months to complete. "It's my party."

"What's more important?" Blake asked.

You, is what Daniel thought not a moment after.

"Do this for me."

Daniel tensed up, gripping onto Blake tighter. He didn't want to let him go out into Sagewick alone. Not at night. Not without him. "Why can't we go together?" Daniel asked.

"I'm not totally ridiculous. You do have to tell Josephine you're leaving. Tell her I'm sorry and I'll make it up to her. Besides, I need to get my thoughts together... It's a long story or it's not. It's complicated."

Daniel finally noticed Blake spinning his engagement ring around his finger. His nerves felt like sparks popping and fizzing in the air. Daniel rubbed his arms. "Okay..." He leaned down and kissed Blake's forehead, squeezing him one last time. "Okay."

"Thank you," Blake said with a sigh of relief. He took a step back and Daniel's hand trailed down his arm, down to his wrist, and clung to his fingers. "I'll see you in less than an hour."

"Okay."

It was difficult letting him go.

"Hey, I love you." Daniel let their hands break apart. "For better or for worse."

Blake grinned. "In sickness and in health."

"Til death do us part."

And with that, Blake left the ballroom and Daniel's chest twisted. He didn't know if this was the right thing to do and he hadn't a clue what Blake needed to tell him that was so important. He wondered if it was going to be about the dreams. If it had to do with the

curse.

Consumed by his theories, Daniel avoided making eye contact with anyone as he strolled through the ballroom, until he found Josephine. Her brightness dimed upon seeing him.

"Is everything alright?" She cupped his cheek, which made her look frightfully like his mother and her aunt. He kept that comment to himself to avoid any physical harm, since he was battered emotionally.

"It will be." Daniel kept his voice low and away from prying ears. He touched her hand and apologized. "This is the end of my night. I have to go and I'm sorry, but you can't convince me to stay. I'll make it up to you. Somehow."

"Okay..." Josephine nodded and let him go. "But can't you eat something first? I know you neglect yourself preparing for these functions."

Now that she mentioned it, Daniel's throat was a little dry, but he shook his head. "I'll be alright. Thank you."

He kissed his cousin's cheek and hurried to find his coat. He thought about leaving through the front door to catch a cab, but the back door would be the safest bet from avoiding paparazzi. He doubted leaving the party without Blake would look good. Besides, he could run faster than any car in this city that was too busy getting stalled in traffic. He stepped outside into the darkness with snowing drifting to the ground in sheets. He cursed, imagining Blake out here.

"Daniel."

Daniel whirled around, surprised by Ignacio standing there for whatever reason. He let out a sigh of relief, just remembering the little demon never had a presence. "Don't scare me like that, Iggy," Daniel scolded.

"I'm sorry for more than you could possibly understand," Ignacio whispered, and Daniel noticed his scrunched brow and miserable

grimace. Daniel moved in closer. Somehow this night was more about creating problems than solving a few. "And to Nicholas, I'm sorry as well."

"Nicholas?"

Too concerned with Ignacio, Daniel didn't react to the hand on his shoulder in time. He couldn't rip free or dodge out of the way of the dagger coming his way. The movement wasn't human. The dagger wasn't ordinary, but the hand wielding the weapon Daniel recognized as it plunged inside his chest. Just inches from his heart.

"You bastard," Daniel spat out, his mouth filling with his own blackened blood. It dribbled down his chin as his knees shook and he landed hard on the frozen street.

"Oh, you have no idea," Adrian practically sang, wearing a smile Daniel had never seen... but still felt strangely familiar. It was the last thing Daniel saw before his vision burned to an ugly charred black.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Wow there's a lot to unpack here. Lol. Sorry for the title of the book name drop. Literally could not help myself. Also, it's something dumb and cheesy before THE STORM. Sorry to Daniel. So sorry. Truly. And Blake. Like so sorry.

Don't forget to leave a comment and tell me what you think!

Here we go! Buckle up friends!

34. Blake

BLAKE

"He has to prove himself," Adrian had said. "If he doesn't leave the party for you, it means he will never care about you as much as he cares about himself. Test to see if he'll give you control."

Thinking about those words now, Blake wanted to vomit. The butterflies in his stomach were merciless, bouncing and smashing up the walls of his organs. And he was so cold. The night had an especially deep bite, the frost creeping through his skin and down to the bone. He cursed, rubbing his hands together and conjuring the last of his warmth into his hands to make a small flame. He used its heat like a reverse sunscreen to protect from the cold. It wasn't as potent as his usual spells. It was because he wasn't focused. He was too concerned with Daniel.

He reached for his cell, debating to phone Daniel up and call the whole thing off. He felt so stupid and immature making demands like he did. Honestly, Blake would've forgiven him in the ballroom... but Adrian's voice had stopped him.

"He needs to show remorse," Adrian's words wormed their way in again. Blake had been listening to Adrian's advice ever since he was a kid and he never steered him wrong before.

Sighing, Blake strolled deeper into the park, remembering a gazebo around here somewhere that would work for at least a little cover. The path was marked with cobblestone and lots of foliage along the way.

The lights from the lampposts were dim, but the Christmas lights wrapped around the pointy naked trees were warm and bright. Some lights were shaped like snowflakes and the posts were wrapped in garland. Blake wished there were some Christmas music, not just the low hum from the city and his thoughts. It was

odd to look over trees and see skyscrapers.

Some laughter behind Blake cut through the peace. He glanced behind him as two guys were stumbling and laughing about something. None of them seemed to care about Blake, engrossed in their own conversation. They seemed young. Around his age maybe. A yelp flew out his mouth as Blake hit something hard, and he stumbled back.

"Hey, watch out," the man in front of him said. He was built like a bolder with cropped hair and wore only a sweater in this snowy night. "If you don't look where you're going, you could get hurt."

"Uh, sorry," Blake said and took a step to the side, attempting to walk around him, but the boulder man mirrored his action and stopped him.

"Hey," The man smiled, a flicker of excitement in his eyes as he leaned closer and popping Blake's personal bubble. "You wouldn't be Blake Winslow? Would you?"

That question pulled the air out of Blake's lungs. It deafened all the noise in the world. Suddenly, Blake was hyper aware of this man's size. "Uh," Blake's voice came out shaky as his heart plummeted to his toes. "No. I don't know who that is, sorry."

He turned around, but the laughing guys were there and too close to be an accident. Just two of them felt like a second wall in his way. One guy with icy blonde hair held up a magazine with Blake's stupid face right on the cover. It was a picture of Daniel and Blake exiting the Venture Hotel after their cake tests.

A better time.

"So, this isn't you?" The other guy egged Blake on, treating him like an idiot.

"No," Blake insisted, attempting to go around, but they moved in front of him again. It was getting harder to breathe. They were too close. He was getting boxed in. All his exits were disappearing.

"Don't be so bashful," the blonde laughed and smacked his shoulder

with the magazine. "You should be more confident."

Blake jumped. "So, what if I am Blake Winslow? You know that means there's a castle full of people waiting for me. A small army of vampires that will make you pay if you do anything to me."

This just made them laugh harder and Blake's whole body flushed. He didn't like this. Every look, every laugh was making his skin crawl. The boulder man behind him licked his lips and Blake's stomach acids curdled.

"Spoken like a prince!" The blonde cackled.

His buddy smacked his shoulder and joked, "Where are our manners? Your highness." He bowed, which made the others laugh and bow too.

"Get out of my way," Blake demanded and finally showed his hands, the fire wafting up his hands bright and warm enough to be threatening. They didn't know it wouldn't do much more than a carpet burn. A mild annoyance. Blake was too cold to produce anything more but this looked good enough to threaten a vampire.

"*Whoa!*" The third guy said and jumped a few feet back.

"Well, that's not nice," The blonde man said, looking past the fire at Blake's face. His eyes flashed red, and Blake had a horrible sense of déjà vu. "Drop it and stay still."

Blake pulled against the enchantment, tugging back at the strings tugging at him. The fire flicked in and out as Blake tightened his jaw and thought about Daniel, Adrian, and about everyone else, thinking about their voices and how they'd be screaming at him to fight back.

"You're tougher than you look," the man behind him laughed and not a moment later, something hard contacted the back of Blake's head. Blake crumbled, losing his focus and the fire. His thoughts were replaced by only pain and the throbbing at the back of his skull. Snow clung to his cheek. It had snowed enough that Blake was officially soaked.

Soon.

Daniel will be here soon.

Someone grabbed him by the collar and smiled with his fangs out. "Behave, little witch."

This time, the vampire's bewitchment stuck, and he wore it like a concrete jacket. Blake got yanked upward on his feet, his limbs useless and heavy, like a ragdoll made of stone.

"Hey!" The boulder man snapped, ripping Blake out of the other's hands. "I get the first bite."

"Aw, come on," the smallest man complained. "You're greedy. You always drink too much and all we get is a couple of drops."

"Cowards eat last," the boulder mocked the other, chastising him into silence as he loosened Blake's tie and then, the buttons on his shirt. Blake wanted to struggle, internally screaming at himself but there was too much weight pressing him down.

There was a prick first, a searing pain next as the vampire's fangs sunk into his skin and a tear dropped from the corner of Blake's blank eyes. It felt like getting split apart. The smell of blood bloomed in the air and tickled Blake's nose. Some blood slipped between the vampire's lips and trickled down his collar and back. It was a sinking feeling, getting his blood sucked. He could feel his blood thinning. His life draining. It was a nauseating, head swimming kind of feeling that made Blake wish he could close his eyes.

If Daniel was close, he'll be able to smell the blood.

He was going to be here any second. In a flash and Daniel will pull these guys off Blake just like he did outside of Josephine's bar. Any moment.

"My turn," one snapped and ripped Blake out of the other's mouth, creating ruts along Blake's shoulder. The pain exploded and blackened his vision from the pain, but Blake didn't make a peep. The next man bit right into the other side of his neck and the

sounds of his slurping and sucking made Blake cringe in disgust.

Blake's body went colder to the point of just feeling numb and heavy. He focused on his breathing, on staying present enough to keep his eyes open. He didn't want to go to sleep if he didn't know where he'd wake up or in what state.

But Daniel was coming. It was going to be fine.

The third couldn't wait any longer, snatching Blake's wrist too hard. Blake thought his bones were going to snap. His bite on Blake's wrist had a sting like nothing else and another tear escape his eyes.

For whatever reason, as Blake was struggling and failing to keep his eyes open, a little past the men he could see a blurry vision of Henry Winslow. Angelic Henry Winslow shaking his head, but why? Was he upset? Disappointed? Looks like Blake couldn't survive in this life either.

What a joke.

Then, everything and everyone pushing and grabbing and biting and hurting Blake vanished. He was weightless for just a moment until he collapsed onto the ground and regained his senses. Breathing hard, Blake grabbed both sides of his neck and the floodgates opened, all the tears he had held back poured down his sticky hot face. He finally wailed, a mirror shattering sound of anguish.

The noise of someone's bones crunching made Blake pop his head up. Adrian snapped one of the blonde man's arms back too far for comfort and he screamed. Adrian only released him to knocked him around the face, making him spin out and crash into the nearest bush. All Adrian's movements were fluid, but too quick for Blake's mind to register until he stopped moving. Blur here. Adrian kneeing one in the face. Blur there. The boulder man would be thrown over Blake's head, only stopping when his back snapped against a lamppost. Blake turned around to find the last one was on the ground.

In a blink, Adrian appeared in front of Blake with his arms open

and Blake was a child again. He reached for Adrian back, who gathered Blake up in his arms. "It's alright," Adrian whispered, but even he was shaking and holding Blake almost too tight. "I've got you. No one else is going to harm you."

"He didn't come," Blake sobbed. His body hurt, but the pain of his heart breaking was unbearable. The world seemed so wrong. The night too dark. Too cold. He wanted to go home. Not to the Sagewick castle, but back across the ocean so he could sleep on his childhood bed.

"I'm sorry. It'll be alright."

"I don't understand."

"I'm here. I'm here."

He cradled Blake even closer, and Blake never felt so small and fragile before. From the sound of Adrian's voice, Blake was lulled to sleep.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This was sooooo sad to write. Oh my god. I was just looping Burn from Hamilton over and over and like tearing up. And I'm just gonna cry more. Lol. The next chapter is THE LAST dream chapter. So much is happening! AH! It's all happening!!

Don't forget to comment and tell me what you think.

And if you like this book, check out my other completed novels!

35. Henry

TRIGGER WARNING: VIOLENCE. MURDER. SUICIDE. DEATH.

Author's Note:

For anyone that would like to skip this chapter, I have provided a vague summary of the plot points you'll need to know at the bottom. Or if you'd prefer, please message me and I'll send you the summary that way.

Much love, Miss Bonnett

#

I had been awake for a while with my eyes closed, listening to Edward get ready for the day. At any point the sounds came too close, my body tensed. His scuff of shoes blasted my eardrums the way muskets sounded before they shot birds out of the sky.

Edward sat on the edge of the bed and I froze, readying myself for anything. His breath scattered across my bare skin like dozens of little spiders and I swallowed a whimper. His hand dragged through my hair and I could feel the edge of his nails.

"Henry," he whispered, putting my charade to an end. I let him say my name again, a bit louder.

"Henry..." A third time was too dangerous to test.

"Hm?" I hummed and stretched out my limbs, performatively. I opened one eye at Edward looming over me. His smile was a good sign. The chokehold around my heart slacked a little. No more pain for now. I could deal with that. "Are you leaving already? It's not yet dawn."

"I have some business to attended to before dawn, but I'll be back before you know it..." Edward said, dragging his finger back and forth across my bare shoulders and back. "I was thinking," he said in a way that

made my chest clench. This would be phrased like a suggestion, but it was nothing except an order. "It was quite nice to hear that during my last trip you stayed in this room. Makes me feel like I know where you are...."

His finger left a trail of goosebumps along my skin. "It's how I know you're waiting for me. So while I'm gone, you should stay here. Agnes can bring up your food."

I fixed the smile on my face, avoiding any tremors or twitches, despite my heart beating so fast it threatened to burst out the middle. "That does sound lovely," I said, making my voiced despair sound more like exhaustion. "I think I'll stay in bed."

Edward bent down and kissed my temple, keeping his lips close. "I'll join you, if you're still here by the time I get back." He made a promise I wished he wouldn't keep and kissed my lips next, turning the acids in my stomach rotten. But I kissed him back and when he got up from the bed, I turned and pretended to find a comfortable place to go back to sleep. Waiting for the sound of the door to close, my heart dropped when I also heard a click.

Throwing the covers off, I ran to the door, but I knew better than to try to open it. Edward could still be close. I counted my breaths. My hand on the doorknob. Even without clothes, I needed to know.

With my weight, I twisted the knob and found resistance. "Dammit!" I spat, slamming my hand against the wood, but the fury was still festering inside me like a wild animal biting and scratching its cage. I kicked the door, threw my shoulder against it, until the door got the better of me and I stumbled with pounding muscles backwards. Catching my breath, I collapsed onto the floor and tried listening to the outside world.

He was trying to lock me up forever.

But I was meant to see Nicholas today.

Climbing back to my feet, I rushed to the window. The glass was cool with the explosion of winter outside. It was almost too bright to look out into. With a little prayer, I tried that too. It still wouldn't open. I struggled with lock more, my stomach dropping as I realized the plight of

caged birds.

Not a single part of me thought Edward was kidding. He meant it. This was him finally locking me away as if I were another one of his acquired paintings or statues. To gather dust. And then, be forgotten.

"Henry!"

I yelped, flinging myself into the window and drawing the drapes around my body. "Jesus, Iggy," I gulped in the air and pressed my hand over my heart to keep it from escaping. "Don't scare me like that."

Ignacio's red smoke still lingered around him as he approached. His eyes wide and face ashen. My horrible feeling had suddenly, somehow gotten worse. "Henry," he called my name like a dying man and I reached for him, wishing to save my friend.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..." for the first time, Ignacio's eyes were wide in fear as he reached for me. "I'm sorry."

"What is it? Tell me what's wrong."

Ignacio dipped his head, pressing it to my chest. "I understand if you never forgive me and I don't want to make excuses because I'm on your side but... I can't go against or lie to Edward. So when he asked me..."

When I found the floor, Ignacio joined me, head still bowed in shame. "Tell me."

Ignacio looked up at a loss. "He knows about Nicholas and I'm pretty sure he's on his way to kill him. I'm sorry. If it wasn't for me-"

"Stop," was all I could say after the air had been sucked out of me. His words landed like punches. Edward's punches. The kind that lingered and bruised. "Don't say that. You are wonderful." I smiled, but the tears poured anyway. "You're the only friend I've ever made and I'd never take that back. You can make it up to me later, but first I need to get out of this room."

"Right..." Ignacio tried pulling himself together as I quickly put on some

clothes. I didn't bother with most buttons or straps, hoping the heavy coat I owned could make up for it. It was almost impossible to move my fingers when they were completely numb. I had no thoughts other than Nicholas. All I could see was his smiling face and wish that it would never end.

Ignacio disappeared in his red haze and I heard the door unlock. I didn't wait. Running at full speed, I kissed Ignacio again before taking off.

"Please, be careful!" Ignacio yelled after me.

It was the closest I had ever felt to flying, my feet barely touching the ground as I ran through the castle. Breaking into the winter air, the cold ripped through every layer, through my skin, and down to my bones. I could feel the wetness in my eyes freeze. I snuck into the stables and stole a horse, begging this sweet creature to take me into the village as fast as possible.

My stomach wouldn't stop turning. Vomit at the very edge of my throat. No thoughts. Just fly. Keeping soaring. Yell at people to get out of the way. Speeding through and jumping off the horse as soon as I made it to the bar, where Nicholas had a room on the top floor.

The owner, Tobias jumped back as I grabbed him. "Jesus, Henry! What are you doing?"

"Is Nicholas home?" I yelled, drawing all the attention directly onto me.

"No, he's at his brother's house. Is everything alright?"

The moment Tobias said Nicholas's brother's house, I was back on the horse and off again, using all my weight to drive forward. Tobias called my name, but my vision was narrowed. The ride was a blur. Only images of Nicholas on the ground flooded my mind. All the ways Edward could rip him from this earth. Him bleeding. Nicholas might already be dead. My heart dropped. I saw the small house in the distance, the little farm behind it. The horse barely stopped before I jumped off again, stumbling and landing hard in the snow. It soaked my knees. Or maybe I split my skin open. I didn't care. This entire day was like trying to run inside a nightmare.

The door opened just as I found my way upright.

"Henry?" Nicholas was there, his brow flying up his forehead. He flung himself off the door, meeting me halfway in the snow. The moment he touched me, the tears exploded from my eyes. I could breathe. He was here. My hands could grab him, ground him to me. No sign of Edward's touch.

I made it in time.

"You're shivering." Nicholas cupped my face, and I relished the warmth from his rough hands. His brow pinched together. "And what are you wearing? Henry, let's get you inside."

"It's Edward," I finally spat out, the words clawing up my throat. "He knows Nicholas. He knows about us."

Nicholas slammed the door behind him. He tried pushing me towards an armchair by the fire, but I wouldn't sit. I couldn't.

"Let me get you something warm to drink," Nicholas said and I stalked him across the room.

"Didn't you hear me? You should be throwing your entire life into a bag and running."

"You're wobbling," Nicholas said, kneeling in front of me. "You hurt your ankle and your knee is bleeding."

"Nick!" I shouted, joining him on the ground. Holding his face, I forced him to meet my eyes and for a moment, all I could do was look at him. I loved him. I loved him so much. "Edward is going to kill you and I can't let him. You need to grab everything you can carry and go."

"Come with me," Nicholas whispered, grabbing hold of my arms. Turning his cheek, he kissed my palm. Everywhere I touched him, the ice layered over my skin was slowly melting. "My brother bought land on an island named Sagewick. It won't be the same as you have now. I don't have a castle full of servants to tend to your every need. I can't put Thomas into a fancy school, but I'll love him and I'll love you and we can raise him in a house full of family and laughter. That's all I have to give, but I still want you to come."

"That's all?" A miserable, shaky laugh escaped my lips. His face. I never saw him this scared and it wasn't even about Edward. I shook my head. "Don't say that's all. You just described my dream."

"Is that a yes?" He touched his forehead with mine.

"Yes," I whispered and he swooped down and kissed me. Wrapping an arm around my back, he dipped me just slightly as his kisses tasted like tears and a future that I wanted to have more than anything. Everything good about me, about this life was inside of my hands.

"We have to leave," I insisted and covered his lips.

"Let's go get Thomas."

"Do you have a weapon?" I asked, my chest still constricted and small.

"I have a dagger." Nicholas gave a little embarrassed shrug. "And a lute," he said as a joke, but I couldn't bring myself to smile. Nicholas grabbed his cloak and what looked like his purse with all the money he had on hand. He grabbed my hand like it was all he needed, before smiling and quickly pecking my lips.

Nicholas opened the door.

A hand jutted out, the glint of a sword blinding me as it drove through Nicholas's stomach and out through his back. I screamed as Edward pulled his sword back through, grabbing onto Nicholas as he was falling and throwing him into the snow. He raised his sword again and I took Nicholas's lute, smashing it over Edward's head.

He stumbled back, giving me a small window. "No! No! No!" I sobbed, trembling as I came to Nicholas's side, pressing my hand against his bleeding wound. If I could just put it all back. Just put him back together. Nicholas was groaning and his crimson blood was spilling between my fingers just as fast as the tears were falling down my face. This was all too much. Too big of a mess to clean up. I didn't know where to begin.

"Nick, please, no." I bent over, pressing into his heart and craving the sound.

"It's okay," Nicholas whispered. "You're going to be okay."

"Don't leave me," I begged. "Please, don't go. I can't do this without you."

Edward's boot crunched in the snow. I had spent enough time measuring distances between him and I that I knew he was coming towards me. I grabbed Nicholas's dagger and cut through the air, finding purchase in Edward's hand. His blood splattered into the snow.

"You fucking bastard," Edward hissed. "Why don't you do as you're told?"

"Just leave me, Edward. You can't do anything worse to me. This was a punishment? Right?" I kept the knife trained on him. My other hand still slick with blood. Underneath, I could feel all the movement in Nicholas slowly stop. "How could you? He did nothing but love me."

"Love you?" Edward laughed and when he took a step, I straightened my arm. He would still need to reach for his sword. If he did, this dagger would find his back. "Love you? I loved you. I gave you a house. Gave you everything you could want."

"You never loved me. You don't know what love is!" My shouting was sucked inside the desolate void around us. Nothing but white all over the ground and covering the sky. Just nothing. It made it so I could hear our labored breathing. Just Edward's and mine. "All you know is pain and anger. God, Edward with everything you have, why are you so angry?"

"Everything I did, I did for you. I gave us the perfect life and yet, you still betrayed me."

"The money? The power? All that was for you. Not me. If you wanted me to be happy—"

"I'd give you to him?" Edward said like the words sat like poison in his mouth. "This worthless, nameless musician? I don't like people taking things from me. Once they're mine, they stay mine and that includes you."

He held his bloody hand out to me to take. To go back with him. "You're coming home with me and I will keep you locked up for the rest of your life so no other man or woman or thing will ever see you again."

"No."

Edward shook he was so angry. "That man is already dead! Henry, Come!"

"No. You never had me," I declared and flipped the dagger. "And you never will."

#

IGNACIO

While waiting for his master's next command, Ignacio could live weightlessly in the air. He could listen to conversations and spectate the world from a distance. He watched from above Edward, Henry took his dagger and drove it through his own stomach.

"You miserable little bitch!" Edward lunged for his sword to finish the job.

Ignacio saw red.

He appeared, his feet hitting the ground and without thinking, he plucked the bloody sword from the slush of snow before Edward could. Blacking out, Ignacio blinked and found he had slashed Edward's neck. Edward gurgled, reaching for the wound as blood poured from it and spurted to hit Ignacio's face.

The moment Edward's body hit the ground, choking on his own blood, the chains locking Ignacio and Edward together shattered.

The deal had been broken.

Ignacio had never broken a deal before. His insides burned so hot, he swore his bones were melting. He crumbled, dropping the sword and held his stomach. Something inside of him, maybe his own magic was being rejected and Ignacio wished he could just vomit and make the nausea go away. But he swallowed it when he heard Henry's voice.

"Iggy?"

Everything was new. All these feelings. These thoughts and he couldn't put any of it back. The cage surrounding his heart had been broken. Ignacio scrambled to push away this sadness, this earth shattering devastation. He trembled for the first time as he dashed to Henry's side. His hands hovered over the dagger still stuck inside his friend. Something was leaking out of his eyes.

Ignacio touched his cheek.

Tears.

Ignacio was crying.

He still couldn't breathe. And his heart punched the walls of his chest, making him all battered and bruised. It was all so painful. Having this heart had never been so heavy. It was too much. He wanted everything to slow down. To just stop.

"Henry, Henry, can you hear me?" Ignacio asked, trying to meet his friend's eyes.

"Iggy? You're here?" Henry worked up a smile. There was so much blood. On him. Staining the snow. From far away this could look like a rose garden. Ignacio shook his head. He needed to focus, needed to build whatever magic he had left. He could feel it fizzling out since he broke his deal with Edward.

How could he do that?

Demons didn't do that.

Demons didn't cry either.

Demons didn't care.

But Ignacio did.

"Henry," Ignacio spoke up, trying not to yell. He kept his voice firm like he was losing his mind. "We don't have much time left. Remember how I had a deal with Edward? That's gone now." Ignacio forced a smile and touched Henry's cheek. It was so cold it stung. "You and I can make a deal. Tell me what you want.

Anything you want, but I can't save your life until you tell me to. I can't do anything until you tell me to."

"Nicholas... he's..." Henry closed his eyes tight. He couldn't say it, but Ignacio knew. He recognized that glazed overlook on the musician.

"I can save him too."

"You can?"

"You have to tell me. I can't do anything on my own. You have to ask me."

"Save him," Henry croaked. His was so grated and thin. "Make him something less easy to kill. I want him to have a long life."

"I will, I can do that and now, you. Just tell me to close the wound." Ignacio was still smiling, trying to be as encouraging as possible despite his tears. "I'll just leave a scar. That'll be my payment—"

"And make sure Nicholas forgets me."

Everything but Ignacio's slacked jaw froze. His heart broke into two jagged pieces and an ocean of tears flooded out. Henry might as well just slapped him. He dropped his head. "Henry. If you say it, I have to do it."

"Good. If he forgets all about me, he can move on and not get caught up in my messes. There'll be nothing he regrets."

Ignacio took Henry's hand, using it for strength. Ignacio rocked back and forth, his anxious festering now. He could hear the tick of Henry's clock running out. "Okay. Okay. Whatever you want."

"And my brother, Thomas Winslow. He doesn't have a future anymore."

"He can, Henry and he can have you too—"

"Then, whatever you can do to set him up for a good life, please do it. He just needs to be comfortable and on his own. I don't want him

to be trapped underneath a master."

"I'll give him a skill. Something. The payment can be..." Ignacio searched the empty sky. Out here, he felt totally alone. "It can be a percentage of profits or something. I don't know. Please, Henry. *Please*. Just tell me to save your life. It has to be from your lips."

"And Iggy," Henry smiled, a trail of blood spilling out of the corner of his mouth. "Find a way to be happy. I don't know what that looks like, but I want that for my dearest friend."

Ignacio shook his head. "Don't do this. I won't forgive you. Please, Henry. You have to ask me to save you. I can't do it on my own. *Please*..."

Henry turned. With the last of his strength, he reached for Nicholas's hand laying limp in the snow. But Henry couldn't reach. Soon Henry stopped trying. He stopped breathing. Stopped living, the light draining from his eyes.

"Dammit!" Ignacio cried, bending over Henry's chest. He slammed his fist in the snow just above him and wailed. His crying rattled his entire body as the anger boiled over inside him and he screamed.

"Dammit. Dammit." Ignacio shot up and paced back and forth in front of Henry and Nicholas. "Fine! If that's what you want, then fine!" Shooting his hand out straight, what looked like a thunderstorm was building from underneath Ignacio's hands. "I will bring Nicholas back as something nearly unkillable. Even better!" Ignacio snapped and began moving his hands in small circles, one on top of the other. The sky rumbled and the snow fell harder. Around them, a wind tunnel appeared, whipping their hair and clothes, flecks of ice and snow swirling too.

"I'll make him faster and smarter, and I'll make it so he can rise to the very top. I'll give him everything Edward wanted and more."

"And Thomas. I will give him magic. The magic I wanted to give you and it'll be more than what any witch has ever been born with so he can go on to do incredible things and in..." Ignacio could hardly stand. He needed rest. He needed time if he was going to use

the last of his power on this deal.

He looked at Henry on the ground, reaching for his lover. He never thought he'd be so angry at Henry, so shattered. Through the tears, Ignacio forced out the words.

"In five hundred years, you'll come back." Ignacio almost couldn't say the rest, another sob stuck inside his throat. "You'll both come back. Nicholas Bellerose and Henry Winslow will come back, and you will come together in matrimony to create a bond so great that you'll be able to take this power from me. To make me mortal so I can never hurt the ones I love again. That is my price or else everything I promised will die. I will make you live."

His spell settled into the bodies and soon, the storm settled and quiet returned to the world.

And only Nicholas stirred. He gasped out, opening blood red eyes and clutched his throat. Writhing, he screamed out in fear and confusion as fangs grew inside of his mouth. He touched them and his face, searching the grounds of the farm. Ignacio took a step back, disappearing, but not completely.

He just couldn't be seen, but Ignacio knew he was fading away.

Crawling through the snow, Nicholas approached Henry and grabbed his body. He gathered Henry's small limp body and stared at it, examining him. Ignacio feared the deal didn't stick. Then, without so much as a second thought, Nicholas plunged his fangs into Henry's neck and drank blood for the first time as a vampire.

And at the same time, miles away at a boarding school, Thomas Winslow received a scroll explaining his new found gifts and what was expected of his descendants five hundred years down the lie. Thomas Winslow was brimming with all kinds of questions, including just who the Bellerose family were.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

SUMMARY: Edward tells Henry that he prefers it if he stays inside

his room while Edward is gone. Once he leaves for the day. Edward locks Henry inside. Soon, Ignacio arrives to say he's the one that told Edward about Henry's affair with Nicholas. Henry escapes to save Nicholas, but Edward followed him there. He murders Nicholas and demands that Henry leave with him. Henry takes his own life instead, but before Edward can finish the job, Ignacio kills him.

Ignacio breaks his deal with Edward and tries to start one with Henry to save his life. Instead, Henry asks for Iggy to save Nicholas and to make sure Nicholas forgets him. He then asks for his brother to be set up for a comfortable life and that he wants Iggy to find happiness. When he dies, Ignacio is devastated, but heeds the deal: making Nicholas a vampire and Thomas a witch. To make himself happy, Ignacio will force Henry to come back and be with Nicholas in five hundreds to MAKE Henry live. This uses the remains of Iggy's magic, so he disappears.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE PART 2

I actually wrote this two days ago at midnight. Just crying. I waited to edit it because it just makes me cry and sad. I wanna go over it again later before I put it elsewhere. Also, I hope the summary is okay. What do you guys think? Did I miss anything? Is it still too intense to read? Or is it okay?

It's crazy that we're here. After reading all the theories and guesses to what happened, I've been burning to reveal the truth about the deal. I'm itching to know your thoughts!! Is it what you expected? Are you surprised? Are the Romeo and Juliet vibes too strong, haha? (I wonder if anyone noticed I named Josephine's Club the Verona on purpose (as like a hint)?)

36. Blake

BLAKE

The present came back to Blake like the sky had fallen, the universe crushing him underneath its weight. Sometimes when Blake knew he was having a nightmare, he could stir himself awake. However, Blake couldn't escape tonight's endless torture. It was like struggling at the bottom of the ocean, drowning in darkness, and fighting the sink of sand. His muscles pounded and as he roused awake, Blake discovered a hot sticky wetness covering his cheeks.

Blake groaned and fought his own body to try to get up, slowly gaining ownership again. He had no thoughts. Just memories flashing over and over again. He shut his eyes tight, trying to push them away, but he only saw blood. He only saw Nicholas curled on the ground dying.

Tightening his fist, Blake remembered the weight of the dagger in his hand.

"Headache?"

Popping his head up, Blake locked eyes with Ignacio in the bed next to him. Ignacio was back in his demon form, red skin, horns, sharp teeth, and golden eyes. A month ago, Blake would've looked at him like he was something that needed to be killed. Something monstrous. But in this morning light, Blake burst into tears and threw his arms around the creature.

"Whoa!" Ignacio jumped, but he didn't hesitate to return the embrace Blake back. "What's this?"

"I'm sorry," Blake sobbed and held on tighter. He could feel his wounds now, the bite marks that nearly ripped him apart. They cried out for mercy, threatening to open up otherwise, but Blake refused to let go.

"Sorry? You haven't done anything to me," Ignacio whispered and stroked his hair, attempting to soothe Blake.

Using Ignacio to get up, Blake took a deep breath. "I have to find Danny."

"You still want to find him?" Someone asked.

Blake jumped, grabbing Ignacio as he turned to find Adrian by the window. He was looking out into the falling snow. He tilted his head. "He abandoned you last night and you still want to find him? Blake, you're better than that."

"It doesn't make sense," Blake said. He got off the bed and went searching for his clothes, breezing by Adrian on his way to the dresser. "Something must be wrong. Danny wouldn't do this."

"He was angry with you," Adrian reminded Blake. "People do a lot of terrible things in anger."

"Not Danny. He wouldn't just abandon me or anyone, actually." Blake opened his dresser... but his clothes weren't there. There were clothes, but nothing he recognized. Blake took out a maroon sweater. As they came, Blake spoke his thoughts aloud, "If Danny said he was going to meet me, he would. He's too reliable... these aren't mine."

"They're in your drawers," Adrian laughed. "Whose else would they be?"

"Right," Blake said and shook his head. He must've forgotten Michael buying them for his new wardrobe. Quickly as he could with his wounds, he started exchanging the suit from last night to the maroon sweater, white button up, and tan pants.

"I think you should wait to look for him," Adrian said, walking up behind Blake. "You were so hurt last night. I don't want to see you like that again. He shouldn't be given the chance to hurt you more."

"But that's the thing. He doesn't want to hurt me. He'd never hurt me. Something has to be wrong." Blake turned for his nightstand but didn't see his phone. Thinking it must still be in his suit, Blake

rifled through his clothes and then, the floor. "I'm going to find Michael and see if he knows where Danny went. Or maybe Frances knows. I bet he was at the Gala longer than us. Oh! And Josephine. She had to have been the last person to see him—"

Adrian cut Blake off. "All you're going to do is cause a panic. Daniel is the one at fault. He should come to you."

"Where's my phone? Iggy, have you seen my phone?" Blake asked, still searching.

"No, Blake," Ignacio said softly. He sounded as tired as Blake felt.

Frustrated, Blake kicked his clothes and sighed, extra annoyed by the fact he was thinking about Daniel fussing at him to keep his room cleaner. Now of all times. Blake's chest was still aching. He wanted to see Daniel. He needed to see him. Blake didn't like that he was too far to be seen. That he wasn't just an arm's length away.

Blake stormed to his bed, searching the covers. "You're not listening to me. Something's wrong—"

"You're not listening to me," Adrian roared, and Blake froze. His blood went ice cold as he shrunk back. Never in his entire life had Adrian yelled at Blake. Or anyone. Adrian never raised his voice louder than necessary. Once, Blake and his father, Clay were harassed outside of his office building, but when Adrian dealt with the man, his voice was hardly above a whisper.

Adrian must've saw something on Blake's face because his tune changed, his demeanor softened as he fixed a smile on his face. "What I mean is that I'll go find Daniel. You stay here..."

Blake fixated on every detail of Adrian's walk, his face, and his eyes.

It wasn't like Adrian at all.

But Blake recognized it all the same.

"I like knowing where you are," Adrian's voice said.

In that moment, Blake completely disappeared. He let what made

him, him vanish and replaced it all with Henry Winslow. With his most loving smile, Blake squeezed Adrian's hands back. "Okay. You're right. You're always right."

"That's right," Adrian chuckled as if they were joking.

Blake listened for anything else, for anyone walking by. Nothing. The castle never felt bigger.

His self-preservation kicking in, Blake went in for a hug and over Adrian's shoulder, he locked on Ignacio. Blake widened his eyes, hoping his horror had been conveyed. Ignacio ever-so-slightly nodded, and Blake could feel a rigid horrible crack down his body. Blake was in danger of destruction. This was now a living nightmare and Blake couldn't wake up from.

Blake moved back, putting his hands behind his back as he opened his palm and called the knife still on his tray from yesterday's lunch. The little thing whizzed through the air and landed in his hands. Blake squeezed it and stepped out of Adrian's path.

On his way by, Adrian used his shoulder to pull him a little forward and then kissed the top of his head. Blake held his fear back and kept himself from flinching. He held his breath as Adrian walked all the way to the door and left. Breathing hard, Blake threw himself at the door and he wasn't surprised to find it locked. Bending down on his knee, he blew through the tumblers and they all dropped away.

Jumping up, Blake threw the door open, but a hand caught it. Blake yelled, jumping backwards as Adrian swept into the room in a blur and shoved Blake the rest of the way inside. He slammed the door behind him and locked it again.

"What are you planning to do with that knife?" Adrian asked.

"Stay away from me," Blake snapped, raising the knife, and putting it between them.

"You wouldn't hurt me, would you? I'm Adrian. Your best friend. Your caretaker."

"You're not Adrian. I know you're Edward."

The fake Adrian smiled wickedly, curling the sides of his mouth as if him and the whole world was laughing at Blake. He didn't flinch at the knife once. "You've changed in a lot of ways, Henry and yet, you're still so stupid."

Adrian snatched the blade of the knife and pressed his fingers into it. His blood flowed and from his fingers, spilling down his arm. The horror Blake felt punched through his chest and twisted his heart. Blake was speechless and almost ran to him but couldn't. His legs were cemented to the ground. Going to him was like sticking his hand in front of an angry snapping dog.

"I am Adrian." He took a step forward and Blake's foot mirrored him, moving backwards. "At least in body. Is this not his blood?" Adrian switched the knife to his other hand to show Blake his bleeding wounds. "If I take this knife and drag it across my neck? Will that somehow not kill Adrian? Should we test it?"

"You won't." Blake shook his head, panicking. "That means it's over for you too—"

"Wrong again." Adrian let out a horrible laugh. "God, aren't you tired of being wrong? I'd stop wasting my breath if I were you. If this vessel goes, I'll find another one. I only picked him because he seemed worried about you. Guess I got lucky he was so perfect and this one..." Adrian admired his arm and hands as they twisted the blade. "A vampire. How interesting."

In another blur, Adrian closed the gap again and Blake stumbled, the back of his legs hitting the bed. Blake was able to catch himself before he fell. Pressing the knife to his own cheek, Adrian spilled a little more blood and turned Blake's stomach. "These little cuts won't kill this body. But if I throw myself out that window? If I drive this knife through my heart? Would that do it? Are you going to kill Adrian?"

"Stop. Stop. What do you want?"

"What's mine. I had a deal with that fucking demon--" Adrian pointed the knife at Iggy "--and he broke it, so I'm privileged to some retribution. Ignacio promised to give everything I wanted to

Nicholas. Well, I'm taking it back. At the end of the week, I will be the one to marry you and gain control of that power and the coven."

"No. It can't work like that—Iggy?" Blake searched for Ignacio in the room. He didn't know how long he was there, but Ignacio was behind Adrian, perched on the couch. His eyes were dead, staring at the floor. The last of Blake's warmth vanished. All the blood drained from his face and limbs. "I'm not going to marry you. Fuck you."

"You will if you want to save your family and the Bellerose's lives."

Blake's jaw tightened. "It won't work or make sense to anyone."

"Ignacio," Adrian said.

On command, Ignacio stood up. He walked up to Adrian and touched his back, encasing him in a familiar red smoke. The moment the cloud billowed over Adrian's head, it started evaporating to reveal Daniel's double. He smiled and Blake's fear twisted into anger.

"I hate you," Blake told him, fighting the burn of tears. "I hate you."

"I'm hurt." Using Daniel's face, Adrian pretended to pout and made sobbing little noises. It made Blake's stomach twist.

Then, he smiled, and Blake wanted to punch it clean off. Daniel or Adrian or Edward took the dagger and started for the door again. Blake didn't move, feeling chained there and trapped in this room. "Where's Daniel? Have you done something to him?"

Edward snickered, still playing with that knife. "I'll tell you after the wedding. If I find out you went looking for him, I'll kill him and Adrian." Taking the knife, Edward slit his arm up and his skin unfolded. "If I find out Daniel escaped, I'll kill him and Adrian. If I find out you're told anyone about me, I will kill Daniel and Adrian. Do you understand?"

Blake's jaw clenched.

"Answer me, Henry."

Closing his eyes, Blake could only manage a nod.

"Good." Edward closed the door behind him.

Locking it once again.

Blake hated the sound. How long did that take? A minute? Maybe a few? It took so little time for Blake's entire world to come crashing down and around to trap him for good. Still, so trapped in one little room. His chest tightened and he couldn't catch his breath. "Iggy. I am an idiot." And was wasting his breath, suffocating on his own stupidity.

"Blake, no," Ignacio said, finally leaving the couch and moving like he was still something alive. As soon as he was close enough, Blake collapsed into his arms. Clinging to the demon, Blake trembled and tried to breathe through the straw sized tube lodged inside his throat.

"Danny was right and I— I'm the reason this is happening."

"Edward used your love against you, but it's not over yet."

"I don't know what to do. He's got Adrian and Danny hostage and I don't even know where Danny is. I can't let anyone die because of me again, Iggy."

Ignacio's eyes flashed. "Damn."

"Wh-what?"

"Edward is calling for me." Ignacio closed his eyes, flinching at something Blake couldn't hear. Gathering Blake up, Ignacio spoke through the pain. "Remember, I gave your family the tools you needed to survive."

And with that, Ignacio disappeared and slipped out of Blake's fingers. He fell forward with no one to hold his weight and hit the floor hard. He tried to keep from crying, but his grief overpowered him and possessed his senses until there wasn't any Blake left. If Henry could see him now, he'd be so disappointed that he fell into the same traps as before...

If Henry could see him.

If Blake could talk to him.

Blake stopped crying. He pushed himself up and glanced around the room. He summoned a demon here not too long ago. If he could do it once. Maybe he could do it again. Nobody knew about Edward, except for two other people. Blake looked down at his hands and gripped them tight. Ignacio gave him these gifts.

So, he better use them.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

So Blake knows now! And obviously all the theories were right! Edward is possessing Adrian~ Adrian hasn't been really there since the start of the book. Writing this scene was so wild. What do you think? Was it as wild to read?

Please let me know your thoughts! How do you think Adrian will react (if he survives) when he finds out what his body was used for? Are things better or worse now that Blake knows? What do you think Blake has planned?? And how will that save Danny??? And where is Danny?!

As always, if you liked this book, check out my others.

37. Daniel

DANIEL

The last thing Daniel remembered was something about him being completely right. The one time he wished someone proved him wrong. He fought the nauseating wave turning his world over and Daniel upside down. Seconds away from throwing up, Daniel tried pushing away the sickness and a headache. His stomach was already empty enough.

He needed to wake up.

Blake was waiting for him.

Voices slipped between the cracks of his unconsciousness, stirring him awake. It was Adrian and Ignacio. Adrian's voice filled this cold room. Underneath him was a freezing wet floor and Daniel couldn't move, his arms too heavy and his limbs restricted behind his back.

"Consider your position as an assistant over," Adrian dolled out his commands, one after another with no space for discussion. He used up all the air in the room, giving Ignacio no breath to argue. "Only speak when I give you permission and especially stay away from Frances. He's a nuisance that you'll never see again, understand me?" It was a question, but he didn't wait for an answer. "And you're not to speak to Henry either."

"Blake," Ignacio finally spoke up. "His name is Blake."

A tremor of life sparked back through Daniel. Ignacio's backtalk fed him just enough to be coherent. It tasted like liquid courage and hope. "And I have a deal with him too, so I'll talk to him as much as I like."

"You could come out better than before, Ignacio," Adrian said, his voice changing, smoothing out all its edges. "When I become King,

I'll remember if you cooperated or not. So decide for yourself now how comfortable you want your new life to be."

After a pause, Ignacio stated, "You can't trick me, Edward. You've revealed yourself to us and you'll never be able to manipulate Blake or me again. You'll have to try harder now."

"Blake or Henry, it doesn't matter. I've got him exactly where I want him."

"Fine. I'd rather you underestimate him. It'll make things worse for you."

Daniel tried moving to see how tough these restraints were. He wanted to be quieter, but he couldn't take back the sound of the chains rattling. Opening his eyes, Daniel scowled up at Adrian wearing Daniel's clothes and Ignacio back in his demon form, horns, and all. His eyes glowed golden in this dingy prison cell. The smell of copper and mold filled Daniel's chest, threatening to rot the rest of his organs.

One look and Daniel knew where he was immediately by the moisture clinging the stone walls, the moon light seeping from the barred windows made them glisten. The only furniture inside the cell was Daniel chained to the wall. These were Sagewick castle's dungeons.

"Oh, good, he's awake." Adrian smile made Daniel's skin crawl. It was the smile of a stranger. "I expect you to behave down here, Nicholas or else I will take it out on that silly family you've made, and I'll especially take it out on Henry."

"Nicholas?" Daniel's brow narrowed harsher. His irritation sat hot in the back of his head, itchy enough to make Daniel want to rip up his skin. "Why are you calling me that? Who are you?"

Adrian tilted his head, searching for the lie on Daniel's face, but when he couldn't find it, Adrian looked at Ignacio. He glared at the demon. "Why doesn't he remember like Henry does? It's no fun if he can't remember me."

"It was part of my deal with Henry," Ignacio said, his voice so small. He closed his eyes, treating this conversation like a needle prick. A pain he was forced to bare. "He didn't want Nicholas to remember."

"Well, you still owe me, and I want him to remember."

"Remember what?" Daniel barked, yanking on his chains. The resistant wasn't normal, but they were made that way. He should be able to tear himself out or break free from the walls, if was simple iron. But the point of these cells were to keep rowdy or ill-behaved vampires away from the previous crown. Like vampire time-out chambers.

"I can't," Ignacio insisted.

Daniel's frustrations pounded the walls of his skull. It didn't help they were talking like Daniel wasn't even there.

A thought struck Adrian, one that pulled the corners of his mouth into a sharp smile. "Ignacio, you keep reminding me that they're different people. If Nicholas isn't allowed to remember, then I want Daniel to know. Is that loophole acceptable enough?"

Ignacio's face darkened.

Apparently, it was.

Bending down in front of Daniel, Ignacio touched his face. "You need blood, don't you? Your face looks shallow."

"What's going on?" Daniel asked him, trying to ignore the fact Adrian was there. "Why are you on his side?"

"I can't fight my nature, but rest assured, I am on Blake's side."

"Get on with it." Adrian rolled his eyes.

Ignacio dropped his head, his chin trembling. He managed to say, "I'm sorry in advance."

Putting his red hands on either side of Daniel's head, Ignacio's eyes flashed so bright they blinded Daniel. Flinching, in that moment he

closed his eyes, Daniel saw a lifetime of a musician searching for what he thought was a muse but found family instead. He found the love of his life and he was tortured by being unable to protect him.

Henry Winslow.

An angel with golden spun hair and a sad smile. They wanted the same thing: a home and a love without strings attached... they were so close. So close. Until that snowy day. Daniel remembered the cold steel striking through his body and destroying the only future he ever wanted. He remembered hitting the snow hard and cursing himself for being unable to hold Henry back to stop his tears and fix all the things that were breaking too fast for him to put back together. Daniel couldn't stop from dying.

Before this, as a joke, he even told Henry that he needed to die first. That he couldn't bare it if he died before Henry.

It was only meant to be a joke.

But he remembered waking up from the cold darkness to his throat being on fire. The desperation was too high, made him blind, and Daniel reached for the closest body. Still warm. On the brink of death. Daniel sunk his teeth into that person's neck and drained him of the last of his life. The taste of his blood still coated Daniel's mouth. It tasted like sunshine, like salty tears, and a life he was never meant to have.

Over five hundred years ago, Daniel once introduced himself to a beautiful man, "*Nicholas Bellerose."*

Daniel's eyes popped open, tears pouring down his face. He gasped, the weight of another life crushing his chest. He snapped a scowl up at Adrian and he could see it now. He knew. "Edward, you son-of-a-bitch—"

Adrian threw his head back with a laugh. "Yes! This is much better." Delighted, Adrian walked up behind Ignacio, who hadn't let Daniel go yet. "You did well for yourself, Nicholas. You became a king of a whole island. Not bad for a bastard musician. Wait until you see what I do with it."

"You're still the same as ever. Everything you've ever had was because someone built it first and you've just taken it. Not even on your own. You've always needed tricks. Magic. You're only here because you've taken Adrian's body, who was twice the man you ever were. You think you deserve this life? Don't make me laugh."

Adrian's jaw tightened. Daniel struck a nerve. "That's big talk coming from the man chained up. I killed you once and I'll do it again."

Daniel refused to flinch, even if he could feel the phantom cut from Edward's sword. "You're down here for a reason, aren't you? Get on with it and then, get out of my face."

"I wanted to give my thanks to the man that helped plan my wedding..." Adrian smiled as a red cloud encased him, revealing a changed form until Daniel was talking to himself. Daniel bit the inside of his mouth as bile tried to rush out. He couldn't stop from imagining Edward taking his spot. Being near his family and them trusting him. Edward getting his hands on Blake. Again. Daniel's tooth punctured the inside of his mouth and he was happy to taste his own blood instead of Henry's.

"At the end of the week, I will be the one to marry Blake and I'll be given the power you were promised. Everything you took from me, will be mine. If you haven't wasted away before then, I'll try to remember to feed you. I always wanted a pet."

Edward shrugged inside Daniel's body and left with Ignacio close behind. Before they disappeared, Ignacio locked eyes with him. He nodded. It was such a small gesture, but it was loud, and Daniel nodded back. He wasn't going to give up. This life was his second chance, and he wasn't about to give it all away to a spoiled narcissistic prick with delusions of grandeur.

Somewhere in the castle, Blake was there fighting too.

Daniel tried to remember his last moments with Blake, remembering the way he just let Blake go out of his hands and out of reach. He should've kissed him that night. Should've held onto him tighter. Closing his eyes, Daniel promised Blake he wasn't going

to give up. Even on the brink of death again, Daniel was going to crawl, struggle, and fight his way back to him.

History was not going to repeat itself.

#

Author's Note

Daniel finally knows! And he's pissed :D This was especially fun to write. Nicholas and Edward never really got to speak, so Daniel is free to let the bastard have it. Now to just get him out of the cell before the wedding ~

Don't forget to tell me what you thought about the chapter? What did you think about the conversation? Will Daniel be able to escape in time?

If you're enjoying this book, check out my other romances! I wrote them so they can't be THAT bad. lol

38. Blake

TRIGGER WARNING: SELF-HARM (CHAPTER EXPLANATION DOWN BELOW IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SKIP)

#

BLAKE

His face down, Blake rubbed his engagement ring.

Four more days.

He had four days until the wedding.

The breakfast table was full of chatter. Only Blake wasn't talking. He'd acknowledge it when someone would say his name or ask him something, but he kept quiet. Opening his mouth risked everything. Blake didn't think he could hide the horror of the situation from his expression. Beside him, Edward pretending to be Daniel laughed at something Link said. Edward had been holding Blake's leg since the beginning of breakfast.

As soon as Blake spoke, Edward squeezed his leg and drove his nails into Blake's skin. A valley of bruises were blooming across his thigh. It was already sore and struggling just made it worse, made it hurt more. That hand might as well be around his throat.

"Are you not hungry?" Damien asked Blake.

"Um," Blake needed to take a breath and this time, he expected Edward's hand to tighten. "Um, not really. I think the wedding nerves are finally getting to me."

That made Adele chuckle. "I hardly remember mine..." she reached across the table for Etienne's hand. He scooped hers up and pressed a kiss to her knuckle. "Etienne's mother was pretty sure I was going to make a run for it."

Blake forced a laugh when Frances swept into the dining room. He came in hot, and his eyes searched the table. His brows narrowed. "Where's Ignacio?"

"We're at breakfast," Edward said, using Daniel's voice. Blake couldn't stand it. He couldn't look at him. "Why would the assistants be here for breakfast? Michael isn't here either."

"But..." Frances chewed on his thoughts.

Blake opened his mouth to try to say he was fine, but Edward gripped him again. This time so hard, Blake could feel his bones crushing. He hid the pain by taking a sip of his water. Edward spoke up instead. "Actually, Ignacio has been let go."

"What?" Frances's eyes widen. The entire table was flooded with surprised reactions.

Michael had a similar reaction earlier and started asking questions. He'd spent enough time with Blake and the group to know how close they all were. Edward silenced him, which gave Michael another surprised reaction. Edward told Michael, "We're not friends, Michael. If I needed someone's opinion, I'd ask my father. Not the help."

Those words cut Michael deep, Blake could tell and it took everything Blake had not to try to take it back. Michael just gathered himself up, fixed his suit, and apologized. Shame ran through Blake as he watched Michael bow.

He still flinched at the memory.

"I realized his presence wasn't necessary." Edward shrugged. "He didn't do much. Michael is more than capable of handling mine and Blake's schedule. He was practically do it anyways."

"And he left? Just like that?" Frances asked.

"Are you okay?" Blake asked through the pain.

"I'm..." Frances started to say but remembered where he was and who his audience was. "I'm going out."

"Frances?" Link called after him. "Hey, wait up!" Quickly wiping off his mouth, Link jumped up and ran after Frances. He came back a second later to grab his coffee and then, he was off running again.

"I hope everything's alright," Adele said, her eyes trained on the door.

"To be young," Clay whispered as he grabbed what was left of Link's plate, shoveling the food onto his.

"I'm gonna run to the bathroom," Blake said, trying to stand but getting caught in Edward's resistance. Blake tried to play it up as something cute, while he smiled and stroked Edward's cheek. "I'll be right back. While I'm gone, you can tell Damien how well we're doing sharing a bedroom before the wedding."

"You're doing what?!" Damien jumped up and while everyone was distracted, racing as fast as his legs could take him up the stairs, searching rooms and doors, cursing when every single one was locked.

"Your highness?" A maid called out. "Can I help you?"

"Y-yes," Blake stammered, his heart thumping faster than hummingbird wings. "Can you tell me where Josephine's room is? And quickly? It's urgent."

"Oh, well this way," the maid perked up. She sat down her load of laundry and they fast walked through the halls to a corner Blake had never reached before. "Right here-"

Blake was already through the door. "Josephine!"

"Blake?" Josephine did a double take from her perch by the window. She had a tray of breakfast on the side while she was sipping blood and scrolling through her phone. "What are you doing..."

"This is going to sound crazy. It's not going to make sense, but it's why I'm asking you." Blake fished out a small empty bottle. He had to clean out the anti-migraine potion this morning while he was showering. "I need a little bit of your blood. It's for a potion," Blake

quickly added. Not that it made it sound any better.

Josephine stood up, passing right by him. Blake's chest tightened. He chased after her, close on her heels and tried begging. "I can't explain to you what's going on or why I need it, other than it'll help me and Danny and I will literally owe you my life. Just a drop. I promise it's not something hurtful or dangerous and-"

Josephine walked to her desk, took out a letter opener, and then pricked her finger. "Hand it over." Her free hand motioned for the bottle. Blake practically threw it at her, and she smiled, pressing her finger over the lip. Her dark, nearly black blood sluggishly spilled down the side. "I trust you. Now that we're family, Blake, you need to learn that I'm ride or die. You ask for blood? I ask how much. That is how the Bellerose family operates, okay?"

"Okay." Blake nodded and tried not to cry. "And can we keep this between us?"

"I didn't even see you this morning."

"Thank you." Blake took the bottle back and kissed Josephine's cheek before taking off once again. He ran as fast as he possibly could back to the breakfast table, a small jar of Josephine's blood burning a hole in his pocket.

#

"We're going to visit town," Blake's mother, Emma, told him as the families were ambling towards the day's activities. "I'm second guessing my dress for the wedding. Would you like to come? Adele and I were thinking about ice-skating."

"Um," Blake started, wiping the emotions from his face. It was much harder to lie to his mother than anyone. "I'm not feeling great, so I'm just going to rest for the rest of the day."

"Well..." Emma said, stroking Blake's hair. "I did think you looked a little pale at breakfast." She brought him into a hug. He let himself be held, wishing she'd squeeze him even tighter. Breathing in the smell of tea leaves and honey, Blake whole holding her, he could

also hold onto a piece of himself and home. "Take care of yourself. I know you're under a lot of pressure," she said, stroking the back of his head. "But remember there's a whole lot of people who love you and will do anything for you."

"I know," Blake could barely get out.

Emma kissed his cheek, giving him another tight squeeze.

"Is everything alright?" Daniel's voice cut in. Edward put his arm around Blake, taking his mother's warmth away and replacing it with frost.

"I'm not feeling well," Blake said.

"Then, let's get you back to bed. I'll have Adrian bring you some medicine."

Blake nodded, letting himself be dragged back to his room. Knocking his arm away, Blake retreated into the room with his guards up high. He glared at Edward, wearing his lover's face still. Edward rolled his eyes. "So dramatic."

"You've got me back in my room," Blake said. "Happy?"

"Completely." His smile as sharp as rose thorns.

Edward left, locking the door behind him. Letting go of his tension, Blake had to catch himself on the bed. He touched the bottle of Josephine's blood in his pocket and thanking his ancestors that it stayed in there.

From underneath the bed, red smoke rose and billowed to bring Ignacio into the world. He grabbed Blake's face, checking for signs of life. "What are you planning?" He asked. "I know you left the table. Good move to sick Damien on Edward. That man could keep the devil cornered if it involved you."

"Did you see Frances too?" Blake asked.

Ignacio's face fell. "Yes, but I can't focus on him now. Why did you leave the table?"

"I needed one last ingredient, well one of the last ones."

"What else do you need?"

"Candles."

"Coming up."

Blake nodded and Ignacio disappeared again. Rushing around the room, Blake grabbed the knife he hid underneath the bed, the radio, and brought it all to the bathroom that was just as big as his bedroom back home. There were more cabinets and counter space than Blake could ever need with a useless vanity. Everything red from towels to the curtains hanging over the bath, Blake threw out. Ignacio appeared and had to duck out of a flaying pair of red socks.

"What on Earth—"

"I'm going to bring Henry and Nicholas back," Blake explained and grabbed the candle from Ignacio. He started setting them up around the marble counter that surrounded the huge bathtub.

"You're what?"

"The same way I summoned you. They're the only ones that know about Edward and I can send them to Danny, wherever Edward has him held up. They're the last people Edward will suspect to come back too." Between blowing on candles and causing them to ignite, Blake tried to explain the spell and he was losing his breath. "I got rid of all the red and I'm going to play music to lure Nicholas, but most importantly, Josephine gave me her blood."

Blake took out the small vile. "He'll come for his family and Henry will come for his too..." Blake's stomach twisted. The nerves settling in. He thought about this spell so much in theory that he forgot he needed to actually pull it off. "I'm going to warn you. This is going to take a lot of blood."

Shaking his head, Ignacio whispered, "Is there no other way?"

Blake took his hand and squeezed. "Henry will come for you too."

Ignacio refused to let go, ending up helping Blake into the tub. He closed the drain and poured Josephine's blood out in front of him, staining the white. Closing his eyes, Blake reached his fingers out into the world and extending the magic from within his body like flowers opening their buds in the spring. The magic tickled the top of his skin, making him squirm and smile. He was back and the magic was excited to go for a walk.

Taking a deep breath, Blake just did it in one rush, slicing his arm and dropping the knife. He cursed, slapping his hand over the cut. Falling backwards, his back arching as he clenched his jaw and took the pain. He called the ghosts of Henry Winslow and Nicholas Bellerose back to the world of the living with an opened door. "Please, come."

"Didn't you lose enough blood from those vampires?" Ignacio asked.

"It's fine," Blake lied.

His head was swimmy, and his worries bubbled to the very top as his brain was screaming that maybe he cut too deep that it might be impossible for Henry to come back when Blake was still alive, and Edward could storm inside and stop the spell just before Henry and Nicholas could walk through to this side. A cool sweat laced Blake's body and he closed his eyes, feeding all his strength into the magic.

"Hurry, hurry," Ignacio whispered, resting his forehead on Blake's shoulder.

In the very back of Blake's head, he could hear a door crack.

And another slammed open, scaring Ignacio and he poofed out of existence. Dressed as Adrian, Edward stormed into the bathroom, a look of anger that was powerful enough to rock the castle. "You stupid bastard," Edward growled, grabbing Blake's arm roughly as he tried forcing him onto his feet. "You're not going to ruin this for me again."

Blake's body went ice cold and the darkness hit him harder than a baseball bat to the back of the head. He lost the feeling in his legs, landing in Edward's arms and getting dragged out of the bathroom

and thrown on the bed. The last few things he remembered was Edward's mouth over Blake's wound, trying to close it up, and Ignacio floating close to the ceiling to watch over Blake like always. More angel than demon.

But Blake did all he could do.

And let himself finally rest, praying that Daniel would be found.

#

CHAPTER SUMMARY:

Edward is now pretending to be Daniel in front of the family. He seems to be getting away with it, which makes Blake sick. Blake loathes the way Edward puts Michael down and then, announces to everyone and Frances that Ignacio has been fired. Heartbroken, Frances leaves.

After managing to sneak away and get Josephine's blood, Blake uses the same summoning spell he used to bring Ignacio back to try to bring Henry and Nicholas back to find Daniel. His ingredients includes Josephine's and his own blood... he hears a door open on the other side just as Edward storms in. Edward thinks Blake tried to kill himself like Henry, not suspecting anything.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When you think Edward can't get worse he's horrible to poor baby Frances and Michael. But Blake's got a plan! Will it work? Are Henry and Nicholas really going to be able to come back?? And if they can, will they be able to help??

This late late update is brought to you by my soul sucking job. Lol. I haven't had time to do anything fun the last couple of weeks, but thankfully I had a little time this morning. Another chapter is on its way too!! <3

June 30th I have a special announcement!! So, look out for that

39. Daniel/Blake

DANIEL

One year, the families decided to play secret Santa to avoid the stress of buying gifts for everyone. Especially since all the children were at the age where nothing pleased them. Daniel drew Blake's name and he told his mother he didn't have a gift ready in time, so she sent a maid into town to buy something.

She came back with a basketball and on Christmas, Blake did a decent job pretending he liked it. Daniel had lied to everyone, but his old bodyguard Samson, who took him into town and helped Daniel pick out the perfect gift.

Well after all the gift giving and after most of the family were in a comatose state from gorging on cookies, hot chocolate, and other treats. The parents were watching White Christmas while Link and Damien were asleep on the couch.

Daniel snuck away.

His gift was technically wrapped, but he didn't know how to make all the edges nice and smooth. The gold paper shined and was sprinkled with glitter. Not his first choice, but it was all the paper left. He hoped the big gold bow in the middle made up for his lack of skills.

After breakfast, Blake disappeared into the library. All Daniel had to do was walk through the large ornate glass and white woodened doors... but he couldn't. They were locked only in Daniel's mind.

"Your highness," Adrian said, jolting Daniel out of his anxiety induced pacing. Adrian was the same as always, dressed in the same simple gray suit with the same quirked brow and same elegantly quaffed hair and brown all-knowing eyes as always. The man was

nothing but consistent. His hands behind his back, he leaned slightly. "Are you looking for Blake?"

"Um..." Daniel swallowed nervously. "Maybe."

"Is that present for him?"

"Uh, yes."

With a smile, Adrian nodded. "Thought so. Get in there already."

"Thank you," Daniel mumbled and hurried into the library. He caught Blake standing on his tip toes on top of a step ladder. Blake's skinny legs wobbled and Daniel sighed, dropping his present and was there just in time to catch Blake before he hit the floor and the whole family had to spend the rest of Christmas in the emergency room.

Underneath his mop of curls, Blake went wide-eyed and tomato red. "Wh-what? Danny?" He searched Daniel's face like he couldn't believe he was even there. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing in here? Everyone's watching a movie."

"I asked you first a-and you can let me go."

Daniel hadn't realized his arm were still around Blake. Blake hadn't even touched the floor yet. Flustered, Daniel quickly let him down and Blake stumbled to catch his footing. "Sorry," Daniel mumbled, quickly avoiding Blake's eyes by looking for the gift. He snatched it from the ground and hid it behind his back.

"If you have to know," Blake said, not trying to hide his irritation. "I was just looking for a book I was reading yesterday. I left my bookmark in it. Typically," Blake was still talking and as every second dragged on, the more Daniel's anxiety was getting worked up. "I dog ear books, but I feel like this castle is old enough for the kind of ghosts that would get really mad if I did that so—"

"Blake, it's fine. Whatever. I just wanted to give you this." Daniel held out the present just to rip the band-aid off, but Blake stared at it like it would bite.

"What's this?"

"What do you think it is?"

"But you already gave me my gift."

"Well," Daniel shook the present, gesturing Blake to just take it already. "This is the real one."

Hesitantly, Blake accepted the gift. He held it tight in both hands and glanced at Daniel again. "Um, can I open it?"

"I'm not going to do it."

Blake nodded and carefully opened the gift as if he planned to save the wrapping. His smile spread, revealing a small notebook bounded by blue dyed leather and an ink pen. Blake slid his finger over the corner, where his name was engraved in silver. He looked back up at Daniel in wonder and Daniel rubbed the back of his neck, heat trickling up his face.

Daniel felt the need to explain himself. "Last time you were here you were scribbling away and I didn't know if you were doodling or writing, so there's no lines..." Blake glanced inside at the clean parchment paper. "And um, I don't know your favorite color, so I just got blue."

"I like blue." Blake smiled. He held the notebook close to his chest. "I can't believe you noticed..." Even though he stopped there, Daniel could hear the subtext. He meant to say, *"I can't believe you noticed me*."

"Of course I did," Daniel whispered. "I notice everything about you." A beat of silence passed between them as they stared and struggled to talk. At his sides, Daniel's hands twitched. His instincts told him to hold Blake's hand or give him a hug, but that was too much to even imagine. Eventually, Daniel landed on, "Merry Christmas, Blake."

"Merry Christmas, Danny."

"There you guys are!" Link shouted, barreling into the room with

Damien, who hooked his arm around Link's neck and tried bringing him down. They wrestled with each other a few seconds as Link grunted. "What's that?"

"What?" Damien looked up, loosening his grip on his brother.

Their eyes landed on Blake's gift. His eyes sparkling, Blake lifted it like it was a prize he just won. "Danny got me this!"

"Wow!" Link teased. "Two gifts? I guess we know who's Danny's favorite now!"

Damien glared at them. "Why are you giving it to him here? Alone?"

"Yeah, Danny, why you gotta be so intimate? Were you hoping to get a gift back?" Link made kissy faces at them and Blake's face went from pink to bright red, burying them in the hole deeper. Daniel practically jumped away from Blake.

"A-as if!" Daniel snorted. "He was just crying about his other gift, so I thought I'd give him something to shut him up."

"Crybaby Blake strikes again! Nice going. I'm gonna start crying whenever I want something too. *Waahhh* I want a Lamborghini."

Damien grumbled, "But why alone?"

Gawking, Blake stomped his foot and shoved the gift back into Daniel's arms. He glared at him and snapped, "Why are you always like this?"

He ducked his head to hide his tears and ran out of the room, shoulder checking Link on the way out. He nearly ran right over Adrian, who was able to dodge out of the way in time. His eyebrows almost flying off his head, Adrian glanced at Blake down the hall and then back at the boys. Sighing, he walked up to Daniel with an opened hand.

He didn't have to say anything.

Slumping, Daniel gave him Blake's gift. Adrian just shook his head and left Daniel with the other Winslow boys. Sometimes it was

what people didn't say that hurt the worst.

#

Struggling, Daniel couldn't tell if he was having a nightmare or if he was dying and his whole life was flashing before his eyes. Daniel didn't know it at the time, but that was their last Christmas together and that would be the last thing Blake would say to Daniel until they met again years later and engaged.

Despite himself, Daniel swallowed and his face twisted at the pain, the jagged deep ruts scraping down his throat. Every breath, every gulp stung worse than the last. Painful enough to make his eyes water. He took a few deep breaths, the pain at least reminded him that he was alive and he could still fight.

"He could fit through there," someone said, their voice familiar the way Daniel could recognize a voice actor. If he had to guess to earn his freedom, Daniel would've said Nicholas Bellerose... but that was impossible. Nicholas continued, backtracking a bit. "He'll uh just have to bend the bars."

"If he has the strength to bend those bars, why wouldn't he just walk through the door?" Henry, of all people, asked. Their voices were still fresh inside his head.

"See, this is why I love you. For your mind."

"Mm hm," Henry hummed just to be agreeable. His voice was closer. Softer. "He doesn't look good, Nick."

"He's fine! Considering how long it's been since he fed, he should be much worse off. Bellerose men are tough. He gets it from me."

"I don't know if that's comforting or not."

"No..." Some of the joy from Nicholas's voice dimmed. He spoke as if he wouldn't mind if Henry hadn't heard him at all. "I guess you wouldn't know a lot about vampires."

Daniel peeled his eyes open, finding Henry crouching in front of him with no presence to him. No warmth. No heartbeat. Just a

smile. "Hello."

Daniel blinked away the tears, his misery sitting like a fist inside his throat. "Am I dead?"

"You're still alive, Daniel," Henry whispered with a small smile, dressed from 500 years ago and unfortunately, adorned in red. He was so bright inside this prison, his hair somehow golden and his blue eyes bright.

"What day is it?" Daniel asked.

Spinning around, Nicholas stood tall in leathers and boots, and Daniel blinked hard just to make sure he was real. "It's your wedding day!"

"Congrats," Henry said.

"I'm hallucinating, aren't I?" Daniel asked Henry. He couldn't stop staring at him and he couldn't explain the feeling of wanting to protect Henry, the burning desire to push him out of this prison cell. He wanted Henry to escape more than himself.

"No." Henry shook his head as Nicholas took a turn around the cell. He was searching for something, sticking his head clean through the bars, his head shimmering and translucent as it went back and forth through. "Blake sent us to help you get out."

"But how when..." Daniel's eyes glanced up at Nicholas. "If he sent you," Daniel started to ask, unable to stomach the real question. "Is Blake, okay?" He tried instead.

"He's being strong," Henry said, a non-answer, but Daniel would take it.

"We're useless like this," Nicholas declared, waving his hand back and forth through the bars. "We need some reinforcements."

Daniel frowned. "I thought you were the reinforcements."

"Details." Nicholas jogged up to Henry, taking his hand. "Follow me, I have an idea. Don't worry, future me! We'll be right back!"

With that, first Nicholas disappeared and then Henry like water spinning around the drain. Daniel was back alone, by himself and he stared at the room in wonder. Was that even real? Did it even happen? Daniel struggled with his chains again, the metal biting into his flesh. Even if he was exhausted, he still moved, still tried to fight. He had to because Blake obviously knew the truth now because Blake was fighting too.

And Daniel would do anything to see him again.

#

BLAKE

On the morning of his wedding, Blake wanted to scream. His family was all getting dressed and ready together, running to grab their final touches.

"You have to start getting ready!" Emma, Blake's mother insisted.

"Yeah," Link laughed. "Or are you planning to get married in your pajamas?"

"I'm going to get more coffee," Blake grumbled and walked out of his room. He started for the stairs when he turned the corner and heard Michael raising his voice.

"I know something is wrong, sir," he insisted and Blake peeked around to find Edward, dressed in Daniel's body, crossing his arms and glaring out the window. Michael's fists were clenched at his side as he tried to appeal to Daniel, but Edward was like talking to a wall. "Blake has looked sick ever since the Gala and you've been acting strange too. If something is wrong, you can lean on me and I'll try to help. Are you two still fighting?"

"Michael," Edward said. "Don't you think these questions are too familiar for an assistant?" He turned and hearing the words in Daniel's voice broke Blake's heart. "You've gotten too close and I'm tired of the lack of professionalism."

Michael was taken back. His powdered white face flushed an unfamiliar red as he stared at the prince, totally gobsmacked. "Sir, I

apologize. I just thought..."

"No, I don't believe you were. What a thoughtless thing to say to a Prince and soon a king. Would you speak this way to my father?"

Michael's face twisted, his brows narrowing. "Maybe I would if he was acting like an ass."

"Then, you have no business in this job. Consider today your last. If I were you, I'd consider finding a new coven as well."

"Yes, sir." Michael bowed, keeping his head down until Edward disappeared around the next corner. Even then, Michael didn't move. His shoulders trembled and Blake couldn't hold himself back. He ran to Michael. Keeping his voice low, Blake insisted frantically. From here, Blake was sure Edward would be able to sense him, so he didn't have a lot of time. "Michael, don't listen to him."

"I have to, Blake. He's my prince."

"No, no, please..." Closing his eyes, Blake clutched Michael's shoulders. "Stay. Stay until after the ceremony and I'll be able to explain what just happened. I promise that's not what Danny really wants."

Michael shook his head. "But he's right. I've gotten too close. I think I preferred it before he went and changed and then changed me. Before you came here, I would've never..."

"I mean it, Michael I'll have everything fixed before the end of today."

Michael peered at him. "Something is wrong."

"Yes, but I can't say why. Just don't trust anything Danny says and be cautious."

"I want to help."

Blake brought the vampire into a hug, which felt a lot like wrapping his hands around a copper statue. "You'll know when I need you. Just... promise me you won't go."

Michael held him back. "I won't."

Blake heard Edward's footsteps first. He appeared in the next instance, ripping Blake out of Michael's arms. "What are you doing?"

"I'm just congratulating his highness," Michael said, his voice totally even. Blake admired his ability to seem totally unperturbed. "And I thought I'd give him some advice. Remember to just keep breathing. You'll get through it."

"Thank you, Michael," Blake whispered.

"Yes, well my advice is that for your wedding, you actually have to get ready." Edward's hand tightened around Blake's already bruised arm. "I'll escort you back."

He dragged Blake back upstairs to his room, where his parents were waiting right outside. Clay raised his arms. "Daniel! What are you doing here? You're not supposed to see each other before the wedding."

Edward laughed, playing the doting son-in-law way too well. "Isn't that a little old school?"

"Witches are nothing if not superstitious." Clay wagged his finger and took Edward to his side. "Come! Let's talk as father and son. There are a few things my father told me that I think you'd like to know."

"Wouldn't this better serve Blake?"

"Oh," Blake chuckled, enjoying the way Edward floundered. "I got an ear full of it this morning. It's your turn now."

Edward scowled at Blake as he disappeared into his room. At the vanity they brought in, Frances jumped up. He looked behind Blake's shoulder, all the hope in the world in his eyes to see someone else, but when Blake closed the door alone, he deflated. He sat back down and played with the many make-up brushes.

On his phone, Link seemed blissfully unaware. "I'm surprised

Damien isn't here. I bet Frances fifty bucks he cries first, right Frances?"

"Right," Frances grumbled.

"Who do you think is going to cry first?" Blake asked Frances as he approached.

"Danny."

Blake smiled, thinking on a typical day, if he didn't ruin everything that might've been true. Blake put his hand on Frances's shoulder. "Frances?"

"Hm?"

"You didn't get Danny and I a wedding present, did you?"

Frances dropped the brush and stared up at Blake sheepishly. "No. Honestly, my friend Delphine is coming and I was just gonna add my name to hers or my other friends."

"That's fine. I know what you can get us."

"What?"

Blake leaned down, close to Frances's ear so only he could hear. "I need you to ruin this wedding."

Frances was jolted back, staring up wide eyed and confused at Blake. Blake just smiled and tightened his grip on Frances's shoulder. "Don't trust anything Daniel says. Only trust me."

"I don't..." Frances shook his head.

"Do you want to see Ignacio again?"

Frances straightened his back. His eyes were lit on fire with a burning determination. "More than anything."

"Then, ruin this wedding in a way that only you can." Blake kissed his cheek. "Thank you in advance. Now go."

Nodding, Frances gathered himself up. The light inside of him that had gone dim and dark burst with light, his devilish grin returning to the front of the stage. He rubbed his hands together as the ideas bubbled up inside of him. Blake assumed he'd be leaving, Frances turned and set his sights directly on Blake.

"What?" Blake blinked.

"Well..." Frances approached with his hands up in the grabbing position as he wriggled his fingers at Blake like he was a tiny kitten about to get snatched up from a cardboard box. "We can't have a wedding if one of the grooms are missing."

Without warning, Frances gathered Blake, his suit, and his pair of converses up. Blake felt weightless in Frances's arms as he was whisked away in a blur. Frances tittered around a corner when he heard a few voices. Daniel's parents.

"Not that way," Frances said and was off again.

Blake's stomach was doing summersaults. He closed his eyes, pressing his hand over his mouth to keep his breakfast from spewing out. Suddenly, Blake's body hit something soft and bouncy. He fell back onto his elbows, squinting up at a grinning Frances. "Consider yourself taken hostage, Blake Winslow."

He tossed Blake's tuxedo and shoes on the bed next to him.

"Get pretty just in case you get found," Frances instructed, the most excited he had ever seen the vampire. His eyes sparkling, Frances was giggling as he started backing away. "I'm going to single-handedly drive the royal Sagewick family insane."

Taking his declaration and ideas with him, Frances disappeared. Needing a moment to gather himself, Blake glanced about the room. It wasn't just a guest room. It was Frances's room. Blake knew this by the smell, the 80s glam rocker clothes, and the empty wine glasses with old blood staining the bottom.

Ignacio appeared in front of the door. He stared at it like he could see through it and still find Frances. He said, "I'm pretty sure I'm in

love with him."

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Here's the 2nd update! I'll be back on time with the next update! I think I'll be switching from Friday updates to Saturday updates. They'll be easier on me. 6 more chapters left!! AH!

Don't forget to let me know what you think about the chapter! The whole gang is here! Lol. Did you ever expect to see Nicholas and Henry interacting with the modern boys? And look at Frances coming in clutch~ I meant it when I said Frances is the true romantic hero of this book. lol.

40. Daniel

NICHOLAS

Once they were out of the dungeon and in the pristine halls of the castle, Nicholas let go of Henry's hand and took in their lush surrounding. Daniel wasn't aware that they weren't ghosts. Nicholas knew he was only the memory of the real man. He felt real. Felt like the real Nicholas, but that man's soul was alive and well living inside of Daniel Bellerose. Nicholas's great great grandson? He was confused. Glancing at Henry, he wanted to gauge his state, if he was freaking out too. Henry's eyes explored the halls, his eyes climbing from the floor to their high ceilings. His translucent hand reached for a portrait of Nicholas's granddaughter.

"This wouldn't have been our home," Nicholas said, dragging Henry out of his daze.

"But..." Henry shook his head. "You were going to come here, right?"

Nicholas stood in front of Henry, blocking the rest of the world away. He wanted to be the only thing at the end of Henry's focus. "That day, five hundred years ago, the Nicholas you knew, the Nicholas you loved died in the snow. I wasn't the same without the memory of you. Did you think you were saving me? By taking yourself out of my life forever."

"I didn't want to continue messing up your life. I wanted to give you a second chance!"

"This is our second chance!" Nicholas took Henry's hands and held them firm. "Daniel and Blake, they are our second chance."

Henry searched Nicholas's face and the longer he looked, the more his expression twisted and his eyes sparkled with tears. His blue eyes as vibrant as a clear summer sky. "I want this. I want to be with you. I'm tired of being apart."

"And we will," Nicholas said and pulled Henry into his chest. He squeezed him hard, thankful that they could at least touch. "But we're going to lose it if we can't find a way to help Daniel."

"Then, let's go. What did you have in mind?"

Nicholas grinned.

#

Eventually, Nicholas and Henry found Damien Winslow sitting on a velvet tufted bench in a sitting room away from the rest of the action. The whole castle hummed with energy, a manic anxiety making everyone hurry a little faster. Not here. Damien was sobbing into a pink silk handkerchief given to him by Josephine Bellerose. She sat on the floor criss-cross and looked up at him fondly.

"You know, it's very attractive for a man to be honest with his feelings." She sat her hand on his leg. Her emerald gown clung to her arms and torso like a second skin but spilled off her hips like liquid gold. She shimmered, covered in crystals and her black hair was slicked over her head and forehead, held at her neck by a low ponytail. Something in her hair made it sparkle too.

"You shouldn't be embarrassed."

Damien blew into her hanky and huffed. He revealed a sticky pink face that didn't look right with his classic black tuxedo. "I just don't want to hear the teasing."

Josephine chuckled.

Nicholas looked to Henry. "I'll take mine, if you take yours."

Henry nodded.

Together, Nicholas and Henry stalked into the room. Nicholas thanked Josephine for her help before jumping into her body. He slipped into her form like a well-worn glove. He had to make slight adjustments, fidgeting into all her nooks and crannies, stretching out his fingers and wiggling his toes until he found comfort, even in

her heels. Nicholas did a little spin in Josephine's dress and laughed. "I like this. This is fun."

"Certainly interesting," Henry said from Damien's mouth. He smiled softly, getting rid of the rest of his tears. He chuckled as he met Nicholas's eyes. "Like this, you're the one who has to look up at me."

Nicholas smiled, itching to lean up on these heels and test out the fruity gloss on Josephine's lips, but he held back. This wasn't his body and it didn't seem fair without her consent. Instead, Nicholas innocently took Henry's hand. "Let's go save ourselves."

Henry squeezed back and nodded with a determined look in his eyes that Nicholas was relieved to see. He was finally ready to fight.

#

DANIEL

Again, Daniel woke up wondering if he was even really awake. Or was he hallucinating Josephine and Damien running around the other side of his prison cell?

Things were coming and going in flashes. Josephine and Damien together for whatever reason bickering about how to get Daniel out of the dungeon. Josephine's easy _ vanished alongside Damien's confidence. He heard their voices. A bang. A crash and a lot of cursing. But finally, someone's warm hand found Daniel's face.

"It's okay. It's going to be okay," Damien insisted. "It's Henry and Nicholas."

"What?" Daniel furrowed his brow. His mind felt like it was floating and if he couldn't find stable ground, he'd float away.

"Can you use Damien's magic?" Josephine asked, or Nicholas did. Daniel's head was spinning. He had never been under laughing gas. Never needed surgery of any kind, but he imagined this nauseating upside down feeling like he was both awake and asleep was a lot like getting drugged up.

"Maybe..." Henry said, coming closer and Daniel savor his heat. It

had been days since he felt any warmth. Reminded him he was alive. Henry whispered. "I can feel it, I think. Um..."

Daniel momentarily lost consciousness when he heard the break of chains and Henry's sigh of relief from Damien's mouth. Together, Daniel supposed Henry and Nicholas carried him outside and up the stone steps. Anyone outside of the family didn't know about the passageways or even this dungeon. Once during an interview, Daniel's father told the press that there was nothing below the castle but rubble and earth. They've lied for years that during a previous renovation these medieval rooms had been destroyed.

The tunnels opened up behind a line of bookshelves on the third floor. It was a less used hallway with room always busy collecting dust. The coast was clear, but Henry and Nicholas hesitated. His tiny bit of relief was enough to put him back to sleep, until his head hit something metallic and hard.

"Sorry, sorry," Nicholas blurted as the new pain in the back of his head woke Daniel back up. Glancing around his new space, Daniel saw several linens and the walls of a laundry cart. "I'm not sure what we should worry about first," Nicholas told Henry, both of them not realizing Daniel was awake. "The knife wound in his chest or his hunger."

"If we curb his hunger, Daniel will be able to heal himself faster. Maybe Damien has some sort of healing potion or salve in his room —?"

"The kitchen," Daniel grunted, and their heads popped over the metal edges. "Take me to the kitchen. There's someone there that we can trust."

Neither ghost questioned him. Off to the races, Henry took over and rushed the laundry cart through the halls, ignoring anyone trying to catch his attention. Nicholas lagged slightly behind in his heels, when something finally dawned on him, and he caught back up.

"Sorry," he said. "Forgot I was a vampire."

By the time they arrived, Daniel could hear mutterings about

hurrying and that they were going to be late. People were shouting about the wedding cake being missing and how the place of the reception had changed last second. Maybe because he was delirious Daniel didn't remember anything about the reception changing location.

Daniel reached up from the bottom of the cart and grabbed Nicholas's sparkling arm. "Get rid of everybody else but tell Wesley Collins to stay. He's the head chef..." With an amused smirk, Daniel told Nicholas. "And remember, you're a Lady."

Nicholas curtsied and disappeared. A few moments later, the other cooks and people from the catering company flooded outside. Henry threw towels across Daniel's body to hide him as Henry gave out politely sweet goodbyes, too quiet to be something believable from Damien. Not much had passed down from Henry to the rest of the Winslow's.

"Coast is clear!" Nicholas shouted and Daniel cringed, thinking this was definitely going to get them caught and Daniel dead. Henry pushed the cart into the kitchen with Daniel immediately attempting to pull himself up and out. He almost fell, thankfully caught inside Henry's arms.

Damien's smell was there. That fresh herbal smell the Winslow's carried. His heart ached for Blake worse than ever.

"Your highness!" Wesley gawked because what else was he supposed to say when he saw the prince of his coven on the verge of death. Daniel could only imagine the nightmare he looked like based on the look of horror on Wesley's face. Nicholas and Henry had been hiding it well.

Wesley Collins was a beast of a man, a ginger werewolf with enough arm hair to make a wolf pup. He had a barreled chest and a squared jaw while the little freckles littering his pinkened skin was boyish.

With his meaty hand, Wesley grabbed fistfuls of his tuffy in all directions copper hair. His vibrant green eyes were widening to the point of them popping out. "I just..." He had to reach for the words.

"I just saw you—and you weren't—you were fine." He held his hand out, his American accent cracking. "I don't know who to call—Michael. I'll call Michael!"

"Wait, wait," Daniel begged, using Nicholas keep upright. "This isn't going to make any sense and I honestly don't deserve your help at all. Honestly, I didn't remember you existed until a few weeks back. Even though I know we've been introduced...."

Wesley softened. Some of his apprehension was pushed away to make room for his curiosity. Daniel told him, "But I need your help and I'll forever be in your debt. The Daniel you saw today wasn't me. It wasn't the real me. He's a man named Edward that's trying to marry Blake and take everything away from me."

"I'm not sure how much Michael has told you but—" Now that Daniel was talking, it was hard for him to stop. His desperation loosened his lips. He needed Wesley to believe him and to understand. After all this mess, Daniel was going to be as clear as possible with everyone. Especially Blake. "But Blake and I had an arranged marriage to finish a deal with a demon. Not that Michael knew that part, but I'll tell him all about it. I should've told him about it. Whoever marries Blake by the end of today will gain a power like nothing else and it can't fall into Edward's hands."

"Your majesty, your majesty, please..." Wesley raised his hands. "When did this Edward guy replace you?"

"Since the Gala."

Wesley nodded, thoughtfully. "I believe you. What do you need?"

"Blood," Daniel said, and the relief tasted sweet. "It's been too long since I've fed, and I can't heal."

With a nod, Wesley turned for one of the three fridges in the kitchen. "I know you're the real prince and the other one is a fake because last month, my mate thought about quitting and finding a new job. He felt over worked and underappreciated...." There was a walk-in freezer too, but the door Wesley opened revealed shelves of blood bags and Daniel salivated at the sight. "But a few weeks ago,

my mate's been having more good days. He's been smiling more and actually enjoyed going to work."

He handed Daniel a clear medical bag and Daniel sucked it up, squeezing the blood into his mouth and letting it fill his stomach. It wasn't enough. He'd want more and Wesley knew that, turning to grab another. He continued, "Until the Gala. After the Gala, my mate has been miserable. Before, even when work was hard, he hesitated to abandon you. These last few days were different... If it wasn't for Blake, we might've been on a boat back to the states by now."

"I'm thankful you're not," Daniel huffed, eating too fast, but he couldn't help it. He could feel his strength returning with every sip.

"Me too."

"You can't tell anyone about this. I'm not sure how much danger you're in knowing as much as you do."

"But do you have a plan?" Wesley rubbed his jaw, the worry clear on his face. In this moment, Daniel could see the way Wesley was Michael's matching puzzle piece. Michael usually lacked warmth and expression, but he married a man that expressed himself like an open book and as big and warm like a ginger teddy bear. "How are you getting to the wedding?"

Daniel glanced at Henry and Nicholas who had obviously not thought that far ahead. With a small smile, Wesley grabbed a cooler and stuffed it with more blood bags. "Leave the transport to me. Josephine?" Wesley asked, questioning himself because Daniel's cousin was obviously not acting like herself. "Grab the first aid-kit. There's plenty in there that can speed the healing process along."

"And the venue?" Henry asked.

"Leave that to me." Wesley grinned.

With a nod, Daniel closed his eyes and focused all his magic and will-power to the wound in his chest. Daniel knew better. He should be taking things slow. Wounds like this should take days, or at least

hours to close, but Daniel didn't have that time. He didn't care about the scar that would be left behind. The world judged vampires with imperfections like that and yet, Daniel couldn't care less.

Blake was waiting for him.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hey friends! Oh my gosh!! We got so many things this chapter! We got a Nicholas POV and we finally met Wesley! He's my giant ginger werewolf. Can you tell that I like the whole opposites attract thing? Lol.

Now let's go get married!

Don't forget to comment with what you think!

41. Frances/Blake

FRANCES

Creeping his head into the wedding hall, Frances listened to the chaos he created as if he wrote a symphony. He had actual butterflies listening to all the fervor and the panicked questions:

"Why are we starting late?"

"Where are the princes?"

"Do you think everything's okay?"

"Is the wedding getting cancelled?"

They were really losing their minds in there, surrounded by hundreds of years old pews, archways over kaleidoscopic stained glass, and its high vaulted ceilings. The wedding was sprinkled throughout in the anemone and rose bouquets and the candles lighting up the aisle so neither groom would lose their way. It was holy ground that Frances was created to desecrate. Frances's wicked giggle was cut short by a hand grabbing the back of his tuxedo and yanking him from the door. He choked on his good time before getting dragged away like a bad dog. The strength of the hand was strong, but not as powerful as Michael's menacing aura.

"I know you have something to do with this," Michael snapped, his fury flickering around him like hot flames.

"What? I don't know what you could possibly mean!" Frances feigned innocence.

"This has your greasy little immature hands all over it."

Frances guffawed, half to continue his charade of confusion, but also it was just pretty funny. Michael dragged him through the impressive halls, the picturesque example of gothic architecture,

before throwing him into a secluded corridor with a dead end.

The perfect place to murder Frances.

"It wasn't me!" Frances spouted as he stumbled at least an arm's reach from Michael. He was going to make this guy work for it and chase him around if he wanted to kill him. "Why on earth would I ever do anything to upset this wedding?"

"Because you're a menace—" Michael spat when his phone buzzed inside his pocket. Frances noticed the flash of the King's name on the screen as Michael took it out and his stomach twisted. "Frances Petrovic," Michael said and closed his eyes, holding onto the phone like it was weapon he never wanted to use. Frances only realized now that the bags underneath Michael's eyes had blackened to bruises and his posture was slumped and sad. "I want one good reason for your shenanigans today. You have no idea the fragile state the marriage is in today."

Frances's veins went ice cold. He forced a tight grin and raised his hands, his fingers trembling. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Then who called the caterers and told them to go to a different hotel for the reception?" Michael jumped at him, snatching Frances's tie.

Frances shot him a glare. "Who had the nerve to do that?"

Michael yanked him forward. "Blake is missing. The guests are scattered around the church and the street because someone moved the signs. And I'm the first vampire in all of existence that will perish from an aneurysm. Frances Petrovic, if it is the last thing I do as Daniel's assistant, I will not let you ruin this wedding for your sick kicks."

Once the first call went to voicemail, another call immediately flooded in, and Michael sighed. He answered it, "My apologies your highness. Have you found Blake?"

"Michael," Frances grabbed Michael's arm, holding it firm. Meeting his eyes, confusing him, Frances said, "I need you to know and

understand that what I'm doing is important."

"Why?" Michael whispered away from the receiver. "Why should I believe you? What about the last month would give me any confidence in you?"

"Because you know that Danny is my friend and so is Blake."

Michael's grip slacked, Frances's tie slipped between his fingers. Frances told him, "Blake asked for my help. He needed to delay the wedding. If he asked you to do it, would you say no? To that face?"

Unsatisfied, Michael didn't unscrew his grimace as he answered his phone, "Okay... Blake was in Frances's room? He's on his way?"

Frances dropped his head, the crush of failure breaking his bones. He had one job and he still couldn't do it. This was why good things never came to him.

"No," Michael stated, scowling at Frances. "No, I haven't seen Frances. If he knows what's good for him, he knows he should be hiding..." Michael covered the receiver again, shaking his head at Frances. He looked at him like a math equation he'd never be able to solve. "I did speak to Blake and he... well, he didn't tell me he needed time. Why did he ask you for help?"

"Because you're good at what you do and I'm good at what I do."

Michael closed his eyes as if readying for a booster shot. "I swear, if I get fired for this—"

"You can always be my assistant."

"Eat glass."

Throwing his head back with laughter, Frances decided things were going too well and he needed to bolt. Of all the places to hide, Frances figured the best place would be in plain sight. He joined the chaos that was the wedding reception.

Standing in the sanctuary, Frances still couldn't breathe or relax. Eyes drifted towards him like flies to something sweet. He had that

look of knowing more than anyone about the drama and people were thirsty for his knowledge. Frances avoided all eye contact, especially from the stone angels staring down at him.

"Frances! Darling!" Delphine Kelley called from the middle of a row. She barged her way through the well-dressed people to reach him. She shimmered in her skintight golden gown with a matching train. Her white gloves climbed her arms, held on by her glittering jewelry.

"What on earth is going on around here?" She asked, smoothing down her black hair. "As far as weddings go, this one is definitely sticking out. Can't believe I made it here before James and Eric. Oh!" She tapped Frances's shoulder like he wasn't already right next to her. "That man and I over there, Lord Winthrop have a bet going on when the wedding will actually begin. Would you like to join?"

"Uh, no," Frances told her, grabbing her shoulders to steer her back to the pews. He eyed the door, ready to meet his maker. "Let's uh-quickly sit before the king and queen of this country come to break me in half."

"Do you need my protection?"

Frances smiled. In this blissful moment, he forgot about all the horribleness and his loss of maybe the only man who would ever understand him. He remembered that even if he'd never get his soulmate, he still had family. He would always have Delphine. "There's not enough time to list all the ways I need you."

She kissed his cheek, careful not to smudge too much lipstick and guided him back to her spot. Frances sat down, but he was still a pile of jitters and fear. Something else was going on and Frances wished he knew what.

#

BLAKE

After Blake got picked up from Frances's room, he blacked out. He just found himself inside the back of a limousine, separated from

Edward. Still drowning in the unknown. His parents were in the same car. The tension was thick like humidity, like a killer bee was somewhere hiding in the corner of a car and any sudden movement would set it off.

They were all late and Blake's aura was as bright as the darkest part of the ocean. He was bent over with his head rested against his clenched fists as he silently wished for Daniel to be alright for his spell to have worked.

The car stopped outside the Sagewick Church and Blake thought he might vomit.

He blacked out again until he was outside the giant ornate doors that led to the chapel that might lead to the end of his life forever.

"Ready?" Blake's mother asked him, giving his arm an excited squeezed. She whispered underneath the sound of strings and piano, playing Edward and Daniel's parents down the aisle. At the last minute, one of Daniel's distant cousins went down the aisle as one of his groomsmen. Josephine and Frances were meant to walk down before him, but Josephine went missing and Frances was kicked out of the wedding.

Blake wished he could thank him.

"Mm, hm," Blake forced himself to smile and nod.

"Ready or not," Blake's father said, fixing his tie. "It's time."

Taking a deep breath, Blake stood up straight and the doors opened. His parents walked the aisle first, then Link. Blake stayed back, out of view in the shadows as his mind raced. He needed to do something more. Something to get him away from the people. He needed to be alone with Edward.

"Blake," someone whispered, and Blake jumped. He spun around, wide-eyed at his brother of all people hiding behind a saint's statue. "Pass out."

"What?" Blake asked, unsure if he heard him right. The ushers opened the door for him, giving him his cue to walk the aisle. A

wash of music and light crashed into Blake, just confusing him more.

"Pass out," Damien said again and then fell back into the shadows.

The ushers had to say his name, urging him to move. He had already missed his cue and there was an uncomfortable pinch to their faces. Blake shook his head and tried to take a breath. He forced his feet to move, and he marched the way he practiced. No thoughts. Just his pounding heart pounding the walls of his skull. It was so loud. Surely, everyone could hear its thunder. Everyone's eyes were on him, their faces were a thousand spotlights burning his skin.

This would be an easy trick to pull.

He was already shaking. Even his lips trembled as he smiled at the wedding guests. His blood was already thinned from his anxiety. All he had to do was roll his eyes into the back of his head and drop. Going limp, Blake let himself hit the ground hard and a wave of gasps flooded the atrium. The stringed instruments caught off with a screech that scratched Blake's eardrums.

"I've got him!" Blake heard his brother, Damien's voice. "I've got him!"

"Me too! Nobody worry!" Josephine yelled too, grabbing Blake's legs while Damien picked him up underneath his armpits. They lugged him from the floor, fast walking and jostling Blake around.

Her words did not stop the room from creating a fuss. Some people were even exasperated that the wedding would have to be delayed even longer. Blake tried not to take that one to heart.

"Daniel!" Josephine yelled as Blake's body bumped into people and flowers. "You do crowd control and we'll be back before you know it."

Together, they dragged Blake out of the room and only when the doors shut, Blake's eyes popped opened. "What's happening?!" He piped up.

"It's us!" Damien said, still going at full speed. "Nicholas and Henry!"

The threat of tears burned Blake's eyes as he looked between them. It would be too good. It would mean something finally went right and Blake could hardly believe it. "What?! Really?!"

Josephine threw her head back with laughter. "Don't act so surprised! You're the one that summoned us! I'm Nick by the way. You look so much like Henry, it makes my heart flutter."

"I'm right here," Henry reminded Nicholas.

"Put me down," Blake requested with a little struggling and when his feet touched the ground, he turned around and threw his arms around Henry. He was shaped like his big brother and Henry's put his long arms around him. He held on tight, burying his head on top of Blake's hair. This warmth was Damien's, but the affection felt like family all the same.

Henry whispered, "Thank you."

"Helping you..." Blake chuckled through the tears pricking the corners of his eyes. "Is just helping me, isn't it? It's actually pretty selfish."

Henry laughed.

Sighing, Nicholas grabbed their arms and tugged them forward. "Gentlemen, I love you both, but we must keep going. Blake, we have Daniel—"

"You do? Why didn't you say so sooner?!" Blake broke into a run.

It was painful to stay behind them and follow, not just rush ahead, and find Daniel himself. His heart pounded and his mind was flooded with all the things Blake needed to say the moment he saw Daniel. They ran far from the main assembly hall into another where a smaller Christmas party was meant to take place. All the modern decorations seemed wrong placed against the ancient stone and the black steel framing the stained glass.

"Danny?" Blake called as he rushed inside.

Underneath one of the tables, Blake saw a dark hand reach out first and Blake raced over, to grab his hand and pull Daniel out the rest of the way. He hit Daniel hard and everything building inside of him burst at once. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! You were right and I was too stupid not to get tricked—"

Daniel grabbed his face and kissed him, pressing his lips hard and holding Blake so firm, Blake imagined he wasn't going to fall apart anymore. He clung to Daniel's arms. He felt different. His lips were chapped. He smelled so much like blood Blake's stomach unsettled, but he was here. That was all that mattered.

He could squeeze Daniel's arms and feel that he was solid that this wasn't a dream.

"I must apologize too," Daniel said, his coloring off and his eyes tired. "I should've known how much Adrian—or Edward had been manipulating you. I should've been clearer. I should've—"

"No, it's my fault," Blake insisted.

"No, it's mine."

"This isn't going to get us anywhere," Henry stated. "It's neither of your faults."

"It's Edward's," Nicholas agreed. "For the past 500 years, it's been his fault."

"Well, it ends today," Blake said.

He stared up at Daniel and Blake realized his eyes changed in more ways than one... they were deeper and the look he gave Blake was stronger. It reminded him a lot of the way Nicholas looked at Henry in the dreams. Like he was staring up a night sky full of stars with so much wonder and promise of a much grander world. Blake stood there like Daniel's entire universe. Blake leaned up on his toes and kissed him again, gentler this time with a touch of an apology still on his lips.

The doors opened again, and Blake put himself in front of Daniel, who then tugged on him and they changed places. Blake smacked

him because he was the one who looked closer to death. Not Blake. As if reading his mind, Daniel smirked like it was a joke. All the tension lessened as Frances came barreling into the room with the oracle, Delphine Kelley at his heels.

Frances threw his hands open. "What in the world is going on around here? Blake, are you okay?"

He asked, his eyes flickering from Daniel's hand on his wrist and up to his face. Frances did a double take at Daniel, who still wore his suit from the Gala. It was just adorned with new patches of blood stains and dirt.

"It's okay! This is the real Danny," Blake said, squeezing his hand.

Delphine laid a hand on her chest. "This is the most exciting wedding I think I've ever attended, and I once witnessed a bride get carried off by a dragon."

Frances let out a relieved sigh. "Thank Christ. I'll never call you a dickhead again. Not when I've met the President of Dickhead Incorporated. Where's Iggy?"

"Not here." Daniel shook his head. "He doesn't have the option to pick sides, but if we save ourselves, we save him too. We can get him back."

A twinkle of joy sparkled in Delphine's eye as she turned to Frances. "Who's Iggy?"

"No one. Shut up," Frances grumbled, turning a bit red around the ears.

"We need to get this wedding started," Daniel said, squeezing Blake's hand as if to remind him that he was here. There were together. That was what mattered the most. "One of you, Nicholas or Frances, find someone that can officiate a wedding."

Blake straightened and tugged on Daniel's sleeve. Yes, Blake thought, this was all they had to do. Just get married and everything could be fixed and made right. It sounded too easy. Nothing came to Blake easy.

"Who's Nicholas?" Frances asked.

"Look no further!" Delphine flicked her hands up, a huge smile on her face. "I've officiated several weddings and officiating yours would check something off my bucket list."

"You have to make it quick," Blake told the oracle. "No embellishments."

"None? Not even a quick sonnet about the power of love?"

"No," they all chorused.

"Fine, have it your way. It's your wedding..." Delphine grumbled and threw her long train over her shoulders like a scarf before taking her place between Daniel and Blake. This wasn't what Blake imagined to be feeling on his wedding day. He didn't expect his butterflies to feel more like maggots and his heart didn't race at how handsome Daniel looked, but because his abuser was somewhere, looking for him, and could come at him at any moment.

"We are gathered here today—" Delphine began to say, grandly.

"Skip ahead," Blake insisted, too restless to stand still. He couldn't keep one eye off the door.

Delphine rolled her eyes. "Alright. Do you Daniel Bellerose take Blake Winslow to be your lawfully wedded partner, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, in good times and not-so-good times, for richer or poorer, committing yourself unto them for as long as you both shall live?"

"I do," Daniel said.

Echoed by another with the same response, "I do."

Red smoke spiraled from the floor and a rush of magic and heat combusted, shoving Blake off his feet. Only Delphine caught him, but it was too powerful, and they both hit the ground hard. The red smoke didn't even need to fade. Blake wasn't surprised to find Edward standing in the middle of the room. This time he wasn't

Daniel, but Adrian dressed up in wedding attire and with a smug smile that Blake just wanted to punch off.

Standing at his side, Ignacio's face was void of all expression. His horns were out, his skin still red as a shiny apple.

Edward grinned. "You didn't think you could get married without me? Did you?"

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

They're back together again And the whole gang is here~ Can you believe even Delphine is here for the finale? Lol. This will be the second time this woman marries my main characters in a book. I'm writing a Going Rogue Novella about Jess and Drew's wedding. Should she marry them too? It is all the same universe

Don't forget to tell me what you think! How do you think Frances did with stalling for time? And how do you think Michael and Frances's relationship has progressed? Lol. We're heading towards the finale battle >.<

See you next week!

42. Blake

BLAKE

"Fuck you," Blake said, swiping his hand in the air and the nearest table hurtled right for Edward's head, the table draped with a kitschy Christmas tablecloth. Adrian would probably forgive a small concussion. Not that it mattered. Ignacio touched Edward's shoulder and he was teleported out of the way, back towards the entrance door.

Edward snapped at Ignacio. "Couldn't you have gotten me closer?"

Ignacio didn't answer, turning away, when he noticed Frances. His face changed, a flicker of surprise bringing him back to life. It would be the first time Frances really saw him, horns and all. Frances went slacked jawed and he opened his mouth, but for the first time in his life, he was rendered speechless. Ignacio's nose flared and his eyes threatened tears. Blake could hear the crack of his heart breaking.

Setting his eyes on Blake, Edward hurtled towards him, but Daniel met him halfway. They caught each other's hands, creating a booming sudden stop. All Blake saw at first were blurs of the fight. They'd be by a Christmas tree as Daniel punched Edward across his face, but then closer to the punch bowl, Edward would be driving his knee into Daniel's stomach.

Blake blinked and found Daniel across the room, popping a shoulder back into place. Wiping some blood off his mouth, Daniel asked out of breath, "Will it ruin our honeymoon if I break Adrian's arm?"

"No, but if you tear it off, I'll have a few things to say. Keep going, Delphine!" Blake shouted and searched the room, something he could use. Edward took off to punch a hole through Daniel, but Blake clapped his hands together and all the bulbs on the closest

Christmas tree exploded in Edward's face, blinding him long enough for Daniel to pounce. He grabbed Edward's arms, pulling them back as Daniel drove his knee into his back.

"Do you Blake Winslow take Daniel Bellerose to be your lawfully wedded partner?" Delphine piped up behind Frances, who held his arms out and made himself a shield around her.

"Skip ahead!" Daniel grunted, before dodging one of Edward's punches.

Rolling her eyes, Delphine quickly said, "Do you take this man as long as you both shall live?"

"I—" Blake started, but was cut off, thrown by a rush of wind and behind him was a translucent Ignacio holding him back. Blake tried wriggling free, but Ignacio's hands felt like iron cuffs. "I do!" He still bit out.

"Let's keep this between us," Edward eyed Daniel before breaking free.

Blake looked around and everyone was being held back by a copy of Ignacio. "Iggy, you don't want to do this. Remember? You want Danny and me together more than anyone. Almost as much as us!" Blake insisted, but his copy didn't react.

He cursed and looked to Frances who was going through a whirlwind of emotions from confusion to hurt and back. He stared at the copy holding him. Debris hurtled at his head and Frances's copy actually moved him out of harms way. Out of all the copies that one was less see-through.

"Frances!" Blake called. "Try to talk some sense into Iggy!"

"How?"

"That's for you to figure out!"

Blake's attention was pulled again as Daniel cursed, holding Edward's hand back, his nails lengthen and with the sharpness of a serrated blade. Edward aimed it directly for Daniel's chest, where

his wound had already closed. Edward drooled to rip it back open like he was the shiniest present underneath the tree. Daniel's arms trembled. Just as much as he was keeping Edward's hand away, he was getting closer to making contact.

"Your wedding rings," Delphine shouted over the air pressure and the electric Santa that had kicked on from Blake's power surge and was singing Christmas carols. "They're a reminder of the vows you make to each other today—"

"We don't have the rings!" Daniel chocked out.

"Go slower, Delphine!" Blake insisted.

"Make up your minds!" Delphine yelped, ducking behind a knocked over table. She held her hands over her hair. "This ghost of yours owes me for the hair!"

Henry straightened, an idea flickering over his head. Damien always had the same look before inventing some bizarre reason Blake needed to be home by eight o'clock. He glanced at Nicholas. "I think it's time for us to go."

"One last hurrah?" Nicholas smiled behind Josephine's lips.

Henry nodded.

Together, they closed their eyes and suddenly Josephine and Damien crumbled, passing out cold as the ghosts of Nicholas and Henry rushed forward. They knocked into Edward, sending him sailing across the hall. He landed through a string of reindeer, taking them on a ride across the marble floor into the door. For the first time, he didn't immediately pop back up.

With a wobble, Daniel stood and turned. "Skip the ring part. We promise to do it later."

"Iggy," Frances griped, struggling so hard his feet were hardly touching the floor. "I don't know what you are, but I know for sure you want to help us. Stop making it so easy for this bastard!"

"Wait!" Blake spouted. "That's it! Ignacio, as another contract

holder, I demand that you help me too!"

The copy holding Blake let go.

The copies all disappeared, poofing into similar puffs of red smoke and funneling around Daniel, swirling around and around. The whole room filled with smoke and Blake backed into who he assumed was Frances, but he heard Daniel's voice, "I got you. Delphine!"

"R-right!" Delphine piped up but was forced to cough. "Uh, Blake Winslow and Daniel Bellerose, before these witnesses I guess, you have pledge to be joined in marriage."

The smoke faded and suddenly, Blake was looking at a room full of Daniel Bellerose. All looking as haggard and dirty as the one Blake had meant to marry. Blake cursed, feeling the hands of one around his arms and Edward nowhere in sight.

"Get this," one said and punched the Daniel standing behind Blake, punching him so hard he turned into smoke and disappeared. Blake sighed, but his relief didn't last long. The Daniel in front of him... his eyes weren't right. They were brown, sure, but they were warmer like an autumn leaf held up to the sun. Not Daniel's eyes at all.

Blake reached for a near chair and wacked the imposter out of existence. This started a fight between all the fake Daniels, all shouting at each other, at Delphine to hurry it up, and at Blake to be careful. Blake's head was spinning and he kept them away with his chair.

"Let's just go," one Daniel insisted, coming at Blake with a whole extra pinky. Blake took care of him with the Winslow chair special.

Delphine squealed, jumping away from a random Daniel copy. "You have sealed this pledge with your wedding rings. Well," Delphine corrected herself. "You have promised to seal your pledge with wedding rings! Should I finish it?!"

She looked at Blake, her eyes big with the question of the hour.

Blake gulped, looking into the crowd of imposters and finally landing on one Daniel. Daniel with his serious furrowed brow, his dark eyes like staring into a clear night sky, and his alertness.

"Finish it!" Blake yelled.

Delphine did. "You may now seal this ceremony with a kiss!"

"Danny! Kiss me!" Blake cried, pushing through all the fakes. They were as strong as baby powder, getting taken out by elbows and smacks.

Daniel flicked his eyes up and knocked more of the fakes into dust. He reached his hand out at the same time Blake did. Their fingers just brushed as a few Daniels tackled them both. Panic shot through Blake as he slapped his hand over his mouth and kicked as hard as he could. This was someone solid.

The fake Daniel in front of him had red eyes and blood dribbling down his nose. He wiped his with the back of his hand, a smile on his lips. "Didn't know you liked it rough."

Blake did everything to keep from vomiting.

Though that would stop a man in his tracks maybe.

Frances leapt off the ground and jumped on Edward, unleashing a flurry of punches. Edward finally caught one and twisted his hand around his wrist. Frances cried out before getting flung onto a table that collapsed underneath the weight. Almost all of the copies disappeared, rushing to form one being. Ignacio, the demon ran to Frances's side and held his face. He only seemed to breathe when Frances opened his eyes.

Only two remained.

The real Daniel.

And Edward with blood streaming down his face. His teeth yellowed by the blood. Daniel rolled his shoulders back and got ready for another fight. It was a race now. Who was going to kiss Blake first?

Daniel became a wall, a huffing, shaking wall that always stood in Edward's path. Using his hands as wrecking balls, Edward planned to break apart that wall. Daniel could only block half the punches thrown at him.

Edward grabbed Daniel by the throat and slammed him into the ground, breaking the marble underneath. It was a crater the size of Daniel's head, cracking along the sides as Edward pressed harder. Blake used a split second to think, pulling all the nicely wrapped gifts from underneath the fake tree and hurtled them all at Edward's head. It was a typhoon of gifts, rushing through the hair. The first few hit, but Edward dodge the neck dozen. What he didn't tear in two came back at him.

"Danny!" Blake shouted and dove across the floor to reach him. Daniel whirled around, reaching for Blake. The moment Blake felt Daniel's cold fingers, he was yanked against him. He saw Edward inches behind Daniel's head with red eyes, blood covering his face, claws out, and a stream of angry presents hurtling towards them. Blake shut his eyes and smashed his lips against Daniel's.

Delphine shouted for joy, screaming, "By the power vested in me, you're husband and husband—!"

The room went stark white and Blake's vision of the world burned. He was back in the garden where he first saw Henry and Nicholas, the place he realized where they first met and they were sitting together on a stone bench, holding hands. Everything around them was so quiet. So peaceful. As if nothing bad has ever happened to them.

Henry smiled brighter than Blake had ever seen and leaned up to kiss an equally happy Nicholas. Then, everything went bright white.

Blake was thrust back to the present, suddenly upright and floating in the air. Golden sparks whizzed around him and Daniel, streaming what looked like fireworks burst from Ignacio and funneled to them. And the moment Blake's feet touched the ground, he realized his magic changed. It didn't just come from him, the way batteries powered up a toy. He breathed in the magic like oxygen. Could feel

it like electricity in the air. He felt limitless.

He looked up at Daniel, who seemed a little taller and a little more filled out with muscles around his edges. His color was better too, away from the ashen warning of death and back to his cool onyx skin that tested time. No wounds. No scars.

Huffing, Edward was taken back to Adrian's form.

He didn't look so good anymore. If anything, it was the opposite with his face shallow and sweat dripping from his brow. He was caked in his own blood and couldn't catch his breath as he wormed his way backwards. Blake took a step towards him and another jolt of magic zipped up through his body.

"It's time for you to go, Edward," Blake said.

Edward still managed that disgusting smirk. "I'll just see you in the next life. Mark my words, I'll make you regret this."

"No." Blake smiled, a weight lifted from his shoulders. In the middle of his palm, he gathered the magic swarming inside his body and soul, pulling even more from the air. "You won't. I won't let you touch me or Danny or anyone I love ever again. Goodbye Edward. Forever."

Edward opened his mouth, his last words on his lips, until Blake released what he had been building and not only pushed Edward's soul out of Adrian's body, but burned the soul out of existence so he'd never get the chance to return.

He saw just the ghost of Edward's soul in the air before burning to a crisp like a lit match to paper. Wordlessly, he screamed until there was nothing of him left. Until it was just Frances, Delphine, Blake and his husband, Daniel.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

AHHH!!! EDWARD IS GONE FOREVER! Let's get that happy ending going friends 😁😁 Get ready for an endless train of cheese and

cuteness (and surprise guest appearances). It feels so strange that he's just gone. The evil has been vanquished.

Don't forget to tell me what you think!

One more chapter today AND THEN NEXT WEEK IS THE LAST UPDATE EVER 😱 It's been such a long journey, I can't believe it's almost over.

Please let me know what you think!

43. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Once Edward's soul was gone and the magic in Blake's hand fizzled out, Blake almost collapsed. Daniel caught him as Blake's entire body pounded. It was like crossing the finish line after running three 10ks and finishing first. Taking deep shallow breaths, Blake glanced up at Daniel. "Hi."

"Hi." He grinned.

Blake smiled back, reaching up to cradle his face, urging Daniel to lean down. Daniel obliged and kissed Blake. He kissed him slowly, gently to make up for the lost kisses and the lost time. "Hey, Danny," Blake whispered.

"Hmm?" Daniel hummed, seemingly more than happy to just keep kissing.

"We just got married."

Daniel grinned wider and wrapped his arms around Blake, sweeping him up and off the floor. Blake screamed with laughter as he held Daniel back, letting himself get spun around and around. Daniel's arms had gotten bigger and Blake relished in their strength and safety. He finally slipped down and cradled Daniel's cheeks. He pecked his lips with a smile.

"And you'll probably have to get married again," Frances said, grunting as he pushed himself up. He was alone now. No Ignacio in sight. Not that he didn't look. Only the passed out bodies of Josehine, Damien, and Adrian.

"Oh, that's right!" Delphine touched her lips. "Everyone's waiting for you."

Daniel dropped Blake back onto the floor. Blake peeked at Adrian, his stomach in knots. "But what about..."

"I'll stay with them," Frances said. "I'll call Michael and tell him to bring the medical team. We don't want to cause another scene."

"But we can't really go like this," Daniel said, holding his arms up to display the damaged down to his suit from a week ago.

"I'll handle it," Blake said and took Daniel's hands, standing in front of him. He closed his eyes and muttered, psyching himself up. "I have a feeling this kind of spell is like nothing to me now..."

And it was just as he predicted. This enchantment of changing, fixing, dying, and tailoring their clothes used to feel like real work. Now it was nothing harder than just brushing the lint off his shoulders. When he opened his eyes, they all were back to perfection.

This new magic had even spilled out and cleaned up the room, putting all the torn apart displays, trees, and presents back together. It was like a fight had never happened... but Blake could see just the small remnants of his magic. The shift and sparkle of a few edges.

"Feel like getting married again?" Daniel asked, tugging his arm.

"To you? I'd do it a thousand more times."

"Let's start with twice," Daniel tease, wriggling on the same way to kiss Blake again.

#

DANIEL

Leaving the clean up to Frances and eventually Michael, the rest ran back to the wedding hall. They burst through the doors to a hall humming with worry and chatter. They were out of breath by the time they arrived, with the exception of Daniel who thought he could run around the world five times and take one more lap for fun.

All his senses intensified too, and he had to squash more strength

than usual when opening the door. He had a feeling both him and Blake were going to have to relearn their gifts. Like they both just had their training wheels cut.

He squeezed Blake's hand, who's purple eyes sparkled when they met his. From the moment where they had met up again, after all that time being apart, Daniel was surprised by how magical Blake Winslow could be. He saw it the day he summoned Ignacio and he also saw it through his little touches, through the way he touched the world and the way flowers moved as he passed. The way lights flickered. The way his smiles could give Daniel power.

As the last of Ignacio's magic dissolved into Blake and he brightened like an exploding star, for a moment, the world saw what Daniel always had. Blake Winslow, the brightest light in his life. In the world.

"I'm sorry about the delays," Daniel said to the crowd, but mostly to Blake. "It's taken us a long time to get here and I know you're all anxious, but so am I. If you chose to stay, you'll be able to watch me marry my soulmate, so please do."

Blake flushed and smiled, squeezing Daniel's hand. He looked like he was going to lean up to kiss him, but that was skipping a few steps. Eventually, the fuss quieted down and the ceremony started over. The day was creeping closer into the evening, which better suited a vampire wedding anyways.

Daniel and Blake were married for the second time that day. This time in front of the other half of their friends and family. Before they were whisked away to their reception, Daniel found Michael. He heard about what Edward did to Michael and Daniel couldn't wait to apologize. They told him everything. Frances too, who didn't need to go to the hospital like Adrian. They stood right on the other side of the church's exit, still away from the crowds and the soft petals of snow drifting onto the steps.

"I'll understand if you still want to quit," Daniel said, absentmindedly caressing Blake's hand with his thumb. "I want you to be happy wherever you are."

Choked up, Michael shook his head. "Then, I'd like to stay."

"I'm relieved."

"I'm pissed," Frances piped up. "Why am I just hearing about all of this now?"

"It was complicated," Daniel said. "And a family matter."

"Double ouch."

"Frances, I'm truly—"

"And where's Iggy?" Frances raised his arms, refusing the apology.

And it was true. Daniel hadn't seen the demon during the entire ceremony, even though he had always assumed Ignacio would be sitting in the front row, crying louder than anyone. When they didn't have an answer, Frances just grumbled about meeting them at the reception. Daniel and Blake didn't go without checking on Josephine and Damien too, who didn't even remember the entire affair or their possession. It didn't seem to get them down either. They were talking nonstop, hanging off each other and making goo goo eyes.

Damien seemed to have discovered someone else to focus on instead of his brothers.

Eventually, Michael put his assistant hat back on and shoved them into a limousine that would take them to the reception. Daniel realized then that he hadn't let go of Blake's hand once throughout the rest of the day.

"Let me know if your hand gets tired," Daniel tried to joke, but Blake saw right through it.

"Hold it as long as you need to." Blake kissed his knuckles and Daniel kissed his lips.

Resting against Blake's forehead, Daniel felt the strength to admit, "I thought it was over. I thought there was no chance that we were going to get our happy ending."

"This is real," Blake whispered, his sweet voice melting Daniel's anxieties away. "We're alive and here together. It was a long journey over centuries after a lifetime of pain, so we deserve this ending. We've earned our happily ever after, okay? And I'll remind you of that every single day with thousands of kisses and an endless stream of I love you..."

Daniel smiled.

"I love you," Blake said and held Daniel's face, tilting it so he could press their lips together. "I love you." He whispered these sweet nothings while littering Daniel with kisses. The driver was apologetic when he told them they had arrived at the Venture Hotel.

"Drive around the block one more time," Blake begged.

"No," Daniel said, laughing again. It felt good to laugh. To be free enough to let himself go and smile without a care. This was what he wanted on his wedding day.

Daniel eventually coaxed Blake out of the car with the promise of cake and more kissing later. They walked up the steps, waving to the people lined up on the other side of the building, waving at them and congratulating them. Once they were let inside, a few people were trying to guide them to the reception hall, but Daniel had to stop.

Just around the corner, he saw a blur of red.

"One moment," he told the staff.

Pulling Blake's arm, he walked around the corner to find Ignacio standing there, tail literally tucked between his legs. He had tear streaks staining his cheeks as his lip trembled, threatening another flood. "I'm-" His sob caught in his throat and Ignacio gave up, screaming and throwing his arms around them. "I'm so glad you're both alright!"

"Where did you go?" Blake asked, rubbing Ignacio's back.

"I was too ashamed..." Ignacio pulled himself up, keeping his head

low as he cried and clung onto Blake's arms. "You were both so hurt and so... and so beaten and then, what happened to Frances... I couldn't—"

"We're here today because of you," Daniel spoke up. "I owe everything to you, Ignacio. I'll always love you."

Ignacio picked his head up.

Blake smiled and cupped his cheek. "I love you too."

Ignacio just sobbed harder and pulled Blake into a tighter, completely restricting hug. Daniel let his hand go, only to keep his hand on Blake's lower back. Blake chuckled. "You know, Frances is looking for you. He's really worried."

"I can't face him either."

"Maybe not like this..." Blake was able to lean back and meet Ignacio's eyes. He chuckled. "I need to keep up my side of the bargain."

The realization hit Ignacio and the tears stopped. He looked between the freshly married couple like they just told him something as impossible as an ocean on fire or a werewolf could have multiple mates.

He didn't look ready at all, but Daniel still thought to ask, "Are you ready?"

"I... I don't know. I've waited so long that it doesn't feel possible."

Blake smiled. "A deal is a deal."

#

Author's Note

Two wedding in one day? This is Delphine's best day ever. Lol. Frances is a little frustrated... but maybe everything will work out next chapter? 👀 Expect a few more special guests too. I hope you guys enjoy the ending! Let's tie up these loose ends and then... end

the book??? 🤦

Next week is the last update ever and then, I'll be taking a week (or two week) break and then getting back to writing MY MATE HIS MATE AND ME. I'm mostly taking the break to finish writing the Going Rogue Novella I'm working on.

Don't forget to leave your comments about the chapter! See you next week!!

44. Frances

FRANCES

Glumly, Frances sat fussier than the toddler at his table. His cheeks sat firmly between his two hands and he scowled at the people happily dancing. His mood only worsened with Delphine giggling at him and sipping her cocktail.

"Are you going to be like this all night?" James, Frances's friend from back home asked. He wore a vibrant blue plaid suit with swept up light brown hair and matching tie. He worked with Delphine as a matchmaker and managed to nab one of her extra invitations for him and his husband, plus their two kids.

Frances regretted insisting they come. Now he had an audience for his misery.

"Yes," Frances grumbled and started stabbing his drink with his fork, scrapping the metal against the glass. The sound matched his feelings.

James swatted him with his napkin and the baby in his lap wriggled and laughed like they were suddenly playing a game. Delphine laughed to herself again, which only caused James to pout harder. "Care to share with the class, Mrs. Kelly?"

"No," Delphine prodded Frances underneath the table. "It's way more fun for me if I'm the only one who knows."

"Well, I can't fathom what that means and you, stop being a downer. This is my first royal wedding and I missed the actual ceremony because someone sent everyone the wrong way. Do you want a baby?" James offered, at a loss for any other suggestions. He was the fix it type. "Will that make you feel better?"

"Maybe," Frances grumbled and took Jack. He was still small, but

also pudgy and soft like freshly kneaded dough. He already had a ton of hair and giant green eyes like James. "At least this one doesn't talk. Where did Eric and Audrey go?"

"They're dancing." James smiled and waved to his husband on the dance floor. The Alpha of his wolfpack, Eric held their first child, Audrey in his arms and held her hand out like they were really doing some serious ballroom. He had the dumbest look of happiness on his face.

Going to a wedding after kind of getting dumped was the equivalent to shoving salt into a deep cut.

"Don't fall in love," Frances warned Jack. "It's a trap."

"What are you doing? Give him back," James snapped, gathering his son up in his arms. "Honestly, I've never seen you act like this..."

"Just you wait," Delphine said, touching James's arm to hold him back. Her eyes sparkled at something behind Frances. "This is about to get good."

Frances furrowed his brow before spinning around in his seat. His jaw, his good sense dropped to the floor and he quickly scrambled to his feet.

Ignacio stood in front of him.

No longer red or with horns and without a presence. His skin was a warm brown again that matched his gooey brown eyes and didn't match his white hair. This was the Ignacio Frances fell in love with, only now he had a heartbeat.

"Who's that—" James started to say, when Delphine shushed him.

"Where did you go?" Frances's voice came out soft, all the anger driven away by the look of fear in Ignacio's face. Ignacio let out a breath and took a careful step forward, opening up his hand. Frances nodded, giving him his palm. The one Edward twisted. Ignacio rubbed his thumb across his wrist. He was still warm. So warm.

"I'm not a vampire," Ignacio said, meeting Frances's eyes. "I'm not a witch, like I led you to believe and for that, I'm sorry. And..." Ignacio shrugged. "I'm definitely not a demon anymore. There's not an ounce of magic inside my body."

Coming back from the dance floor, Eric leaned down to James with a quirked brow. "What's happening?"

James shushed him.

Ignacio tried to be brave, tried to smile without trembling but he failed. Frances stepped closer, letting himself be the only person Ignacio could see. All the focus needed to be here. Between them. Frances pulled out of Ignacio's grip, only to hold his hand.

Ignacio laughed a little, past the sparkle of tears in his eyes. In a lot of ways, he was a mess. It proved that Ignacio had only ever been himself this whole time. Ignacio shrugged. "In truth, like this, I'm probably more trouble than I'm worth but if you let me love you..." Ignacio took a deep breath. "I promise to love you for the rest of my life. I will love you with all my heart like no one's loved anyone."

And now the world held its breath for Frances's answer.

Frances, the serial dater and self-proclaimed Batchelor for his entire immortal life had just been given a true declaration of love. Ignacio had made a liar out of this vampire. Frances shook his head. "I'm not the most handsome person here. I'm not the richest, the most power and it's easy to say I'm not the smartest. Fuck, I don't any think I'm the funniest but... but I will be perfect for you, Ignacio."

Finally, Ignacio smiled with joy. No twitch. Just total joy and they moved even closer to each other. Frances couldn't help himself anymore. He gathered Ignacio's face in his hands and told him, "I used to think all of my friends went stupid, after falling in love. That they all lost their senses, but I understand it now. I've never seen clearer. Ignacio, I love you too and I promise to hold your hand, by accident, or on purpose, I will hold your hand and settle every craving in your heart. If you want to be with me?"

"I want you," Ignacio insisted, almost jumping when he spoke. "I

want you. You made me feel real. You made me feel alive."

With a smile, Frances went the rest of the way to kiss Ignacio. Ignacio melted underneath his touch, his heart thrumming like a little bird's wings. Ignacio wrapped his arms around Frances's neck, succumbing to the hands around his waist, moving to dip him.

Delphine sighed blissfully. "I love weddings."

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the start of the LAST UPDATE ever 😱 This book tops out at forty-six chapters *whew* It's been a journey friends~ I really hope you enjoyed this chapter!! It might be my favorite love confession I've written yet (but it's hard to say!).

Don't forget to leave a comment with what you thought about the chapter! Did you enjoy the James and Eric cameo? And with their kids???? Oh man, they're a mini-van family now. Lol. AND Frances and Iggy are together now!!! They're so in love. It makes me emotional.

45. Blake/Daniel

BLAKE

Out on the dancefloor, Blake's head was swimming from all the dancing. He must've danced with every member of his family three times over and that now included the Bellerose clan too. Daniel's father was an expert tango dancer. And a showoff.

Blake's mother said, "You look better darling. I'm happy it was just nerves."

"I was never worried," Blake's father added on.

Daniel's mother, who hair had gone back to purely black and strong. "Just wait until after the honeymoon, I still have so much to show you about your new home!"

Link asked, "Drinks are free, right?"

"Is your brother single?" Josephine asked.

"You wouldn't mind if I left early?" Damien had asked after her. "Jo said the club she owns, the Verona is just around the corner."

"Jo, huh?" Blake laughed.

And finally, Blake was introduced to the giant of a man that was Wesley. He had always heard wolves were large, but the bear hug this man scooped Blake up in was almost back breaking. "It's nice to meet you too!" Blake squeaked.

"You're doing too much," Michael fussed at his husband.

"I'm just happy to finally meet them." Wesley grinned like a sun peeking over the clouds, bringing only sunshine and warmth. He was all dimples and freckles and sweetness.

"We should meet properly again over dinner," Daniel suggested, which made Michael stiffen. "But for now, you should enjoy the reception."

"How's about it, dear?" Wesley nudged Michael. "Wanna dust off your dancing shoes?"

"Absolutely not," Michael deadpanned.

"Oh! Don't be shy! Let's go!" Wesley grabbed Michael's hand and dragged him away. Before they disappeared, Blake noticed a little smile pinch the side of Michael's lips.

And then finally Blake was alone with his husband. The quiet settled around them, the music vaguely in the background. A few guests stumbled out of the reception, almost collapsing into a fit of laughter as they dragged themselves towards the bathroom. The door closed behind them and the stillness returned.

Daniel glanced down at Blake. "Are you ready to go?"

Blake nodded, leaning against him and fixing the configuration of their hands.

"Daniel? Blake?" Blake's mother called and both boys had the same idea. They hurried around the corner, pressing themselves against the wall to not be seen. Blake leaned as close as possible to hear the other voices.

"Are they out here?" Daniel's father asked.

"Where did they go?" Another family member popped their head out.

Daniel put his arms around Blake's waist, pulling him closer. He leaned into the crook of Blake's neck, dragging his nose before pressing a kiss there. Blake bit down on his lips to keep from laughing as Daniel whispered, "Let's make a run for it." He kissed the already sensitive skin.

"I'll follow you," Blake whispered, clutching Daniel's clothes.

"No need." Daniel grinned and swept Blake off his feet. "Hold on."

Blake did as he was told and buried himself against Daniel before his husband speed off faster that the first hill of a roller-coaster. Blake did everything to keep from squealing and throwing his hands up. Daniel laughed in return, a pure unbridled sound of joy.

#

DANIEL

Daniel dropped Blake on his bed, but soon joined him, crawling on top of the witch with every intention to kiss him until their lips were swollen. He kissed Blake's mouth open wider so he could slip his tongue inside and find out what a husband tasted like. Daniel learned he'd never tire of the flavor.

Wrapping his arms around Daniel's neck, Blake seemed unstoppable and more confident than ever. It reminded Daniel of teaching him to slow dance. He'd kiss one way and Blake would follow suit, even down to biting his lip and dragging his teeth across the bud of his lip. Somehow, Blake rolled on top. Leaning up, Blake threw off his blazer and went away with his dress shirt next. Daniel wished he could've slowed it down because he could watch clothing slip off his powdered skin forever.

Daniel grabbed his neck, pulling him back down for another kiss, already missing the liquid fire, his labored breathing, and the trill of his heartbeat. Blake coveted Daniel's favorite things, his colors, his sounds, and his voice. Most of all, Blake tasted like magic.

Sliding his hands down Blake's back, Daniel gave his ass a squeeze, pressing their middles together. Blake shivered, curling towards him and Daniel did it again for another burst of fireworks. One by one until the grand finale.

Something moved, Daniel could sense it and when he peeked, he saw several things around his room floating in midair. He blinked, murmuring from underneath Blake's mouth. "Blake. Blake. Love."

"Hm?" Blake glanced behind him and he jumped, then everything

plopped onto the floor. Nothing made a sound that sounded breakable. "Sorry," he winced.

"Don't be," Daniel grinned and ran his hands up and down Blake's thighs. This husband of his squirmed underneath his hands, at every touch. Daniel's pants were getting more uncomfortable by the second. In a blur, Daniel flipped Blake over on the bed and he was at the foot, unbuckling his belt and enjoying the way Blake drooled at the action.

"The way you do that," Daniel explained and kicked off his shoes. "That's the way I feel too. Actually, I have it worse for you. If it were me, everything would be off the ground, including the bed..." Daniel decided to be a gentleman and help Blake out of the remainder of his clothes. "They'd be swirling and crashing into walls. Someone would think we were renovating the whole floor."

"I'm just a little nervous," Blake said. Without his clothes, Danie learned that his husband flushed not only across his cheeks, but down his chest too. "This is my first time."

"We don't have to go all the way tonight," Daniel explained as he joined Blake back on the bed again. He stroked his hair, caressing his fingers through the curls and then down his face. "We can go as far or as short as you want."

"No," Blake whispered and used his finger to follow the fall and rise of Daniel's arms. "I want to but um..."

Daniel shook his head and kissed him once, hoping to erase whatever was supposed to be the end of that sentence. He suggested, "Do you want to be on top or bottom?"

"Um, I think bottom at first." His brow narrowed, suddenly so serious. "I think I'm gonna work my way up."

Daniel snorted and kissed him again. "Okay, then. Just give me all your trust."

Blake nodded. Now that Daniel was asking questions, he couldn't stop. Was this side of Blake's neck more sensitive than the other?

Where inside of Blake felt the best? Should he go slower? Faster? And Blake's answers never arrived the same, sometimes it'd be on the back of a moan, or a long beg, or he couldn't be coherent at all. It all sounded like music to Daniel's ears.

Then, the lights would flicker, and Daniel knew for sure he was doing something right. The first time turned into the second, then third and time was irrelevant. Every inch of the bed had been conquered. Covers coming and going. Blake on his back to climbing the top of Daniel. Daniel didn't have experience with so much intense seat, like he'd be dipped in liquid gold.

Blake cursed, his lips dragging across Daniel's cheekbone before he shuddered out another orgasm that clung around Daniel. Throbbing. Sparkling. Magic. Blissful white hot like his vision burned all around the sides and Blake was the only remining thing in the middle.

Daniel licked the evidence from his husband's chest.

"Wait," Blake begged and pulled Daniel back up, pressing his body down harder as if Blake thought being his husband almost meant being his weighted blanket. Daniel ran his hands down Blake's soft sides, grabbing his legs to hike them up and around him.

This was real.

Daniel had to keep reminding himself. Blake was here and solid and would still be in his arms tomorrow morning. And then, long after that. Smiling, he started kissing the side of Blake's head and his cheeks. Blake giggled, curling away, but not letting go.

Never letting go.

#

Author's Note

Second to last. I'm already crying. I hope you guys enjoyed the blissful chapter and sorry about all the cavities. Lol. We've worked for the cute stuff! Haha.

Let me know what you think! Are you surprised they dipped early? Do you think they're going to annoy their entire family now that they're a clingy couple? Lol. If they could, do you think Daniel and Blake would get married again? You know... without the evil ghost stuff getting in the way? Haha.

THE END

BLAKE

On his third spoonful of cookie dough, Blake noticed a dark hand shake some mistletoe by the door. The bells on the bottom jingled, making Blake laugh and shake his head. He glanced at Wesley to see what he should do.

"Could be a trap," Wesley warned, teasingly. He had come up from their apartment in the city to make Christmas cookies despite having the day off.

Wesley insisted this was his favorite part about Christmas and the castle's ovens were bigger. Meanwhile, Michael painstakingly decorated the gingerbread men to perfection, which was his idea of fun. Ever now and then, Wesley would swing around to check Michael's work, give him a kiss, and Michael would roll his eyes and shoo him away.

"I'm going to test my luck," Blake winked at Wesley and hopped off the counter, leaving his personal bowl of cookie dough behind. "You're in charge," Blake told a floating broom as he passed. He enchanted the cleaning supplies again to keep Wesley from doing anything he didn't deem fun. Now that wedding was over and the deal with Ignacio was done, Blake discussed with his parents about colleges in Sagewick.

About choosing a more magical elective than before now that he had all this untapped magic he never had before. He wanted to learn just as much as he needed the training.

The moment his foot passed through the threshold, Daniel slung his arm around Blake's back and pulled him in. Raising the mistletoe over their heads, Daniel kissed him and enveloped Blake completely. Blake clutched Daniel's arm, getting his own slice of his husband.

Blake leaned back, smiling up at Daniel, "You know you can get all your kisses for free, right?"

"This one is special," Daniel whispered, kissing Blake's neck, and making his legs all wobbly and weak. "It's a Christmas kiss."

"And what would you call the kiss this morning?"

"A morning kiss."

"And all the ones this afternoon?"

"Those were for refuel before work."

"And you're done now?"

"I am all yours, Love."

Blake couldn't argue with that. He grabbed Daniel's waist and pulled him closer until his own back hit the wall. Blake debated coming up with something smart to say about this kiss like it was a before dinner kiss, but Blake would rather just keep kissing.

It was only the sound of two pairs of feet storming down the hall that brought them out of it. "Don't ask!" Frances yelled, waving at them as he and Ignacio lugged what looked like opened coolers full of snowballs down the marble hall. Ignacio was out of breath from all the laughing and running. If they ran any harder they'd bring all the portraits down around them.

Frances and Ignacio would be staying at the castle until New Year's, Frances insisting the best place to celebrate would be New York. He also wanted Ignacio to come home with him to meet his friends and family. He wanted to show off his old stomping ground, reveal everything personal about himself. Ignacio gathered new experience like other people collected stamps.

He was busy discovering all his favorite things, including a few new dislikes such as sour candy and cold showers. Despite a revolving door of taste, Ignacio never changed who his favorite vampire was. Ignacio said he was quite pleased to have a boyfriend and wondered why Blake and Daniel made such a big fuss about it.

While still running, Frances plucked Iggy's cooler from his hand, and they kept running.

"Do I want to know?" Michael called from the kitchen.

"No," Blake and Daniel chorused.

Shaking his head, Daniel took Blake's hand and led him back to the common room, where their families were playing games. Blake couldn't help but notice one person was missing.

Adrian.

Daniel kissed the top of his head and patted his back, motioning him to the balcony. Blake could just see Adrian's back and his stomach twisted. Things hadn't been the same since he visited Adrian in the hospital. First, Blake flinched away from Adrian's touch. Then, Adrian was devastated to hear what his body was used for. A weapon against Blake.

Blake had never seen Adrian so close to tears.

He asked for space. But that had been difficult to handle. It was like being a child, staring up at his favorite teddy bear gathering dust on the top shelf. Blake couldn't reach him.

"Go talk to him," Daniel encouraged.

Blake nodded and slowly made his way through the merriment, his eyes never leaving Adrian's back. His wide shoulders and his heavy coat. He even had shoes on like he was ready to bolt at any moment.

Adrian described his time being possessed by Edward as being asleep and now that he had woken up, he just couldn't remember his dreams. That night Blake and Daniel summoned Ignacio, Adrian recalled the feeling of a powerful cold breeze pushing his soul out and taking over. It had been nothing but darkness since.

Carefully, Blake opened the door to the balcony to not scare him. Not that Blake thought that was even possible. He stepped outside and met Adrian at the railing. "It's strange," Blake explained. "I

thought I'd never get used to the cold but... I kind of like it now." He smiled at Adrian, but his stare was a thousand yards away as he looked out into the forest of pine trees covered in snow like powdered sugar.

"I was going to retire the day I brought you back home from college," Adrian explained. "I should've. Then, I wouldn't have made you suffer."

Blake stood from the railing. "It wouldn't have mattered. Edward would've come back anyways."

"But I was the perfect weapon against you."

He finally looked at Blake and the guilt wrinkling his face twisted Blake's stomach. "Why didn't you retire? Why did you come with me?"

"Because I didn't want you to go alone."

"Keep that thought. Remember that. If you disappear from me, I will always miss you. I will never recover from losing you, understand? Now, hug me. It's Christmas."

Adrian did as he was told and gathered Blake up in a hug. Blake closed his eyes and burned Adrian's shape into his memories, alongside the smell of his aftershave and his old wool coat. Adrian said, "If you call, I'll return."

"I know."

Adrian leaned back. He rubbed Blake's cheek with his cold hands. "You have done amazing things and you will continue to do amazing things. When you feel like you'll never be great again and everything is impossible, remember if you've done it once, you can do it again because you are a constant factor in your life. You'll always be you. Even if you change, you'll always be Blake Winslow."

"I was trying to hold back, but I think I will cry."

Just saying that made it impossible for Blake not to burst into tears.

He threw himself back into Adrian's arm and forced the man to promise to come to the castle for every holiday, which included birthdays. "Even if you get married and have a bunch of kids, you have to bring them too."

Adrian chuckled. "I'm already married, huh? You have a surprising amount of faith in me to find someone. I don't really meet people."

"Hey, I might know someone. I think she's single. Her name's Delphine Kelly and she's an oracle."

Adrian ruffled Blake's curls. "I think I'll try golf first in my retirement."

Eventually, they came inside together, and Blake joined Daniel on the couch. Having a husband was nice for many things, Blake learned after getting an automatic partner for Pictionary and charades. If he asked for more hot cocoa, Daniel would fetch it. He would grab a throw blanket to share when Blake got cold. Blake snuggled up to him as they owned their own couch as a movie played into the evening. Daniel's fingers moved on their own, playing with Blake's hair. He'd pick up a curl and let it fall. Sometimes he'd twirl Blake's hair in his fingers.

"You haven't asked what I got you for Christmas," Daniel whispered.

"I've learned my lesson," Blake laughed sleepily, the exhaustion from the day taking over. He snuggled deeper into Daniel's side. "You're a terrible gift giver."

"What about your converses?"

"One gift out of years of terrible gifts does not give you a passing score."

"Does that mean you don't want it?"

Sighing, Blake climbed up, heavy underneath the layer of warmth and comfort and held out his hands. Daniel shook his head. "It's not here. You'll have to come with me."

"Okay?"

Daniel placed a blindfold in his hands and once he convinced Blake he wasn't kissing, Blake let himself be led into a car. He wasn't allowed to take it off until they boarded a plane. Gobsmacked, Blake couldn't believe there was a fancier plane than the one that first took him to Sagewick. And they weren't alone.

"I thought you might like us all together," Daniel said.

Frances and Ignacio were crowded around a pile of DVDs for the flat screen TV. Frances was having Ignacio guess the plots based on the covers before shocking Ignacio with the actual plots. Blake searched the rest of the plane for a clue with Daniel trailing behind him.

"Don't ask the flight attendants either," Daniel warned him. "I've sworn this plane to secrecy."

One plane ride, two car services, and a piggyback ride later, Blake was sat down on ground that obviously wasn't level. This place, where her was, was nothing like Sagewick. The crispness was gone, replaced by heat and humidity. Blake could hear bugs chirping and crash of waves. He could smell the salt and was bouncing to take his blindfold off.

"Now? Now?" Blake asked, already grabbing at it.

"I got it, you dork," Daniel said and counted down, "one... two... three."

He slipped the blindfold off and Blake's eyes adjusted to the low light. Night had settled around them, their source of light only burning from the golden porchlight and the strings of large bulb lighting hanging from the ceiling. Blake went up to the railing, realizing this house was on top of a small cliff over-looking the water and a huge private beach.

Blake didn't think he'd ever be able to lift his jaw again. "Where are we?"

"I thought you wouldn't be opposed to a honeymoon in Italy."

"A honeymoon?" Blake whirled around, the warm wind ruffling

through his hair. He could smell the ocean. "But what about the Coven? Do your parents know? And you must've had prior commitments—"

While Blake was babbling, Daniel walked up to him, taking his face and brought him into a kiss. His cool skin was such a relief in the heat. Fingers running through his hair and tilting his head to deepen the kiss. All of Blake's static worry left with the breeze.

Daniel pulled away just far enough to say, "You're my commitment."

Blake grinned between his hands and stroked Daniel's arms.

"I know you want to see the world and so do I, but I want to see it all with you."

Blake raised on his feet, meeting Daniel for another kiss.

They had been together since they were babies, kids, teens, and even five hundred years ago. With shining wedding bands on their fingers, Blake knew they'd be together for the rest of their lives. It sounded like an awfully big adventure. Blake was happy not to go on it alone, but hand in hand with Daniel.

#

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT'S OVER! I can't believe it. I really wanted to finish it yesterday, but I forgot how hard last chapters are for me XD But I'm so pleased where it's ended up. I hope this ties up all the loose ends, but if you have any questions about any of the characters, ask me and I'll tell you!

So!! Thoughts? Feelings? What was your favorite part of the book? Who was your favorite character (I don't think I need to ask for your least favorite, haha). And who was your favorite couple?

This is my LONGEST book yet, ending at a whopping 107,163 words. My next books are not going to be this long. Lol. SPEAKING OF my next books: My Mate, His Mate, and Me are already being uploaded, I'm also writing a Going Rogue Novella that should be

relatively short, which will be all about Jess and Drew's wedding.

The Angel & The Musician

[image]

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The Perfect Tree

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Writer Reveal: How I Create/ Outline Stories

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